Marvel Raises Price to 50¢ For 22 Pages!

COMICS FEATURE

No. 2 May
$1.50

Mike Grell talks about Warlord!

The Silver Age of Comics!

The Fandom Zone

Mickey Mouse Up Close!

News, Reviews and More!

David Michelinie and Bob Layton Interviewed!

BOB LAYTON

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Opening Notes

Editorial by Dean Mullaney

Response to our first issue has been overwhelming, and we'd like to thank everyone who wrote us. We look forward to more of your letters and encourage you to let us know what you like about *Comics Feature*, what you don't like, and what you'd like to see presented in these pages. Next issue will begin our letters column, which we expect will be a useful forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

In this editorial every month, I will be discussing my opinions on various subjects relating to the comics industry and to fandom itself.

This time around I'd like to talk about comics reviews and reviewers. In *Comics Feature*, I allow our reviewers freedom to express their points of view, and the opinions expressed in these reviews are those of the reviewer and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of *Comics Feature*. While our reviewers are given ample freedom to present their thoughts, I demand of our reviewers a knowledge of the industry, the subject matter at hand, and a solid base on which to stand. Comics critics all too often shoot their mouths off without a basic understanding of the process of putting a comic book together. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the comics press is itself a "training ground" for aspiring writers and artists. And this "training ground" aspect is a useful and important part of fandom's production of fanzines. It offers a chance for people with a creative urge to develop their talents, while giving them the important ego-boosting benefits of seeing their work in print. The importance of fanzines is a subject unto itself, and will be discussed on this page in a future issue.

The small press zines aside, the reviewer in a larger forum, such as *Comics Feature* with its greater circulation, has a responsibility to his/her readers and the subjects reviewed to present knowledgeable opinions. When a reviewer attempts to tackle the job of legitimate criticism seriously, s/he must first look at his/her own qualifications. Having an interest in the particular subject matter and even a familiarity with the characters and creators which they discuss is not enough. It is an unfortunate aspect of the major comics press that most reviewers are not very aware of the unique process by which comics are produced. Most reviewers have never even seen a comic book script or plot synopsis, or have a working knowledge of how an artist breaks down a story. There also appears to be a lack of knowledge about the role of the editor. While the methods vary from writer to writer, artist to artist, and editor to editor, some fundamental truths apply to the medium as a whole.

To use an analogy provided by Steve Gerber: "Unlike film, where the critic knows what a screenplay looks like and basically what goes on on a set and the function of each participant . . . comic book critics are working completely in the dark."

"Working in the dark" is unfortunately where it's at in comics criticism. There is a naivité to most comics criticism that lends itself to reviews containing basic misconceptions about the industry and its creative working conditions.

In short, having a love of comics is not enough for someone to become a knowledgeable and *responsible* reviewer.

In *Comics Feature*, I demand that our reviewers be knowledgeable *and* responsible. A review is, of course, subjective, but subjectivity means nothing without a fundamental understanding of the medium. ●

HEADLINES

MARVEL TO GIVE 22 PAGES FOR 50¢

Beginning with issues on sale in June, Marvel is increasing the number of story pages in its regular 32-page comics and raising the price of each book to fifty cents. The move follows the announcement, two months ago, by DC that they will increase their story page count and price. Marvel will be doing 22 story pages per issue, and DC 25.

Marvel's Annuals, double-size books such as *What If?* and *King Conan*, and the special issues of regular books will have thirty-nine or forty story pages and will remain at their current price of seventy-five cents. The additional story pages in all the books are being made available by the deletion of advertising pages and the Bullpen Bulletins page. Henceforth the Marvel Checklist will appear in reduced form on the letters pages.

The Marvel magazine line will be unaffected by these changes.

Marvel reverses decision

Two months ago Marvel's policy was to stand by its current price and format, and in the past has waited for some months after DC raised its price before following suit. However, the higher officials at Marvel have now changed their minds and editor-in-chief Jim Shooter believes they have made "an intelligent move."

One of the reasons for their change in policy, Shooter says, is that "We didn't have any dramatic increase in sales the last few times DC increased its price" before Marvel did. "It's not reasonable to hold the line; we have to go to fifty cents eventually." Raising the price to forty-five cents "doesn't make sense," according to Shooter, but Marvel realized that the reader had to receive "more entertainment" to justify a ten cents price increase, and so it was decided to raise the number of story pages as well.

Explaining why Marvel is only doing 22 pages to DC's 25, Shooter commented that Marvel makes twice as much money on its ads than DC does and thus can less afford to cut as many of them. Mail-order ads will go first and classified ads second. However, Marvel feels that classified ads serve useful purposes, and is willing to run them and mail-order ads if and when Marvel does not have enough ads from national accounts to fill its ad pages. On the other hand, Shooter feels that Marvel comics will look better under the new format, and that therefore it will be easier to get more advertising from national accounts.

Only 17 pages at first

In most cases Marvel will run twenty-two page stories in its fifty cent books rather than following DC's policy of doing seventeen page stories with eight-page back-ups. Shooter believes that readers will prefer longer stories about a lead character to short pieces about secondary figures. However, Marvel is unable to prepare such long stories in time for June, and so issues on sale that month and in July will only contain seventeen pages of story. Each of the two months there will be two different contests, or at least two sets of prizes. Covers will bear the heading "This Marvel Comic Could Be Worth $2500 to You." To enter, a reader will have to write twenty-five words or less on an as yet unchosen theme. Contestants will compete in three different age categories: under ten, eleven to fourteen, and fifteen and up. The same contest will run in each Marvel comic during that particular month so that a potential contestant need buy no more than one Marvel comic that month to enter.

Special feature pages will probably appear in various issues on sale in August and September just before the books shift to twenty-two page stories. These feature sections will be patterned after the "Secrets of Spider-Man" pages in the first *Spider-Man Annual*, which explained the workings and extent of Spider-Man's powers and gave readers a better look at his supporting cast and important locales in his series.

Earlier plans dropped

Work on the "Secrets" pages was set in motion before the decision on the price hike. Marvel had been intending to raise the price of its issues on sale in September and October to seventy-five cents and to add eight to ten feature pages to each. Subsequent issues would have reverted to the original price and page count. Now, however, this plan has been dropped.

For a while Marvel considered producing two additional splash pages per issue to be used as the openings of Marvel stories when they were printed overseas. These "drop pages" would not have appeared in the American comics. The reason was that

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foreign publishers of Marvel stories like to deal with story lengths in multiple of eights to accomodate the printing signatures. However, on investigation, Marvel learned that the foreign publishers did not care that much about having two extra pages, and so the "drop pages" idea was itself dropped.

Shooter promises that he will make sure that stories are not "padded" through devices like "lots of full page splashes" to fill out the twenty-two pages. He will not ask writers to do anything differently now that they have more pages to work with. However, he says that he has been "insisting on stories complete in one issue for some time now," and that he hopes that the increase in story pages "will remove the last difficulty in this regard." He is not ruling out multi-part stories, but believes that a story must be particularly good to warrant more than one issue.

Asked how stable the new fifty cent price will be, Shooter stated that Marvel "hopes to hold the price for a long time." -P.S

TEEN TITANS BONUS

The new Teen Titans will make their debut in a special 48-page issue of *DC Comics Presents* on sale in July for no more than the new standard DC comics price of fifty cents. This issue, number 26, will devote sixteen out of its forty comics pages to the Titans story, which is the work of the new series' creators Marv Wolfman and George Perez. The other twenty-five pages will be made up of a Superman-Green Lantern team-up adventure by Wolfman and Jim Starlin, and the second installation of the new back-up feature "Whatever Happened to . . .?", this time devoted to Golden Age hero Sargon the Sorcerer.

The Teen Titans' new book will go on sale one month later, in August.

MARVEL BACKUP FEATURES

There will be some exceptions to the rule that Marvel will now run twenty-two page stories in its books.

The four-color *Conan* book may run some short backups featuring Red Sonja or King Kull.

Ghost Rider 51 will contain a short Night Rider story by Michael Fleisher and Carmine Infantino. Other such backups may appear in the future.

Due to the large backlog of 17-page stories that exists, *Marvel Team-Up* will often run a short story featuring that issue's guest star in a solo adventure.

At first *Micronauts* will run two storylines simultaneously, one set on Earth and the other in the Microverse. The two will finally dovetail, and afterwards there will probably be 22-page stories with occasional backups.

Rom will institute a regular five to six page feature chronicling the adventures of Rom and his fellow Space Knights during the two hundred years between their creation and the present day stories.

Spectacular Spider-Man may occasionally have back-up stories featuring characters such as the White Tiger.

Spider-Woman will sometimes have 22-page stories and other times have backups with the Shroud or other characters.

What If 22 will contain the magazine's final forty-page story. With issue 23, the first with the new additional pages, will come a change in format. There will be a lead story of roughly twenty pages followed by at least two back-up stories. One of the back-ups will be part of a new "Tales of the Watcher" series. The other back-up will often be an eight-to-ten page sequel to previous *What If* stories. There will also be humorous one-page "What If" stories.

John Buscema-Tom Palmer art from the Merlin *story in* Marvel Preview 22.

ELLISON/ KALUTA ON THE SHADOW

Harlan Ellison and Michael W. Kaluta will be producing a new Shadow comic book to be published by Fantagraphics, Inc., the publishers of *The Comics Journal*.

Scheduled for release in early summer, the book will be an 8½"×11" perfect-bound trade paperback. The retail price will be between $6.00 and $7.00. The story, entitled "Dragonshadows," will be set in the Shadow's native 1930s and be an original story by Ellison and not an adaptation of a Walter Gibson pulp novel. The story length has not been decided as yet, but according to editor Kim Thompson will be "at least thirty pages" in a 48 or 64 page package.

Kaluta, who illustrated the *Shadow* comic book for DC in the mid-1970s, will be producing two original paintings for the front and back covers of the book.

The print run is expected to be 15,000 copies.

McGREGOR & ROGERS' DETECTIVES, INC. READY

Don McGregor and Marshall Rogers' *Detectives, Inc.* will be released from Eclipse Enterprises the third week of May. The story, entitled "A Remembrance of Threatening Green," is 46 pages, and will appear in an 8½" x 11" trade paperback edition. The book is printed using metal plates on heavy white vellum paper stock, and the cover by Rogers is in full process color. The retail price is $6.95. A signed and numbered limited edition is also available.

McGregor is also writing a sequel to *Sabre*, which will also be published by Eclipse.

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DICK DILLIN: An Appreciation

Dick Dillin, one of the comics industry's most prolific and consistent artists for nearly thirty years, died on March 2, 1980 at the age of 52 of a heart attack.

Comics Feature asked Gene Reed, a longtime Dillin admirer and DC indexer, to offer his personal tribute to this respected member of the comics field. We join Mr. Dillin's family and friends in mourning his loss.

No one ever wrote an article praising the artwork of Dick Dillin. No fanzine ever featured a cover drawn by him, most likely because no fanzine editor thought a Dillin cover would help sell copies of his publication.

Dick Dillin drew a number of features in the early fifties before he became the penciller for *Blackhawk*. It was an assignment he continued until shortly before DC suspended publication of the book in 1968. *Blackhawk* sold consistently well during the fifties and early sixties when every story was pencilled by Dick Dillin.

When Mike Sekowsky stopped drawing the *Justice League of America*, Dillin was chosen to assume the pencilling chores beginning with issue 63. At the time of his death, he had pencilled 110 adventures, 90 of them consecutively. The only other pencillers to work on the book since Dick Dillin began in 1968 were George Tuska (#153) and Juan Ortiz (#157).

In addition to his work on *Justice League*, Dillin drew numerous other features for DC, illustrating at one time or another virtually every costumed hero published by the company. He drew back-up features such as *Kid Flash*. He illustrated the Superman-Batman team-ups in *World's Finest Comics*. At the time of his death, he was alternating the pencilling chores on *DC Comics Presents* with Joe Staton. Dillin was a mainstay, a dependable artist who could pencil a strip when no one else was available.

Dillin's art was never flashy or cute, but it was evident that he was a master craftsman at his trade. At times, fans complained that his art was "commercial," but the reader never doubted what was happening in the panel or the story that he drew. Dillin believed in presenting the picture simply and effectively.

Heroic characters such as Superman and the other DC heroes were drawn heroically, but at times they were tinged with just the right touch of humanity. They laughed, cried, grimaced and expressed bewilderment, shock, anguish. They were as real as one could expect on a comic book page.

No one can replace Dick Dillin on any of the strips he drew for DC. They can take over and continue, but no one can replace a man who has worked diligently at his craft for almost thirty years.

Except for a short profile in *Amazing World of DC Comics* No. 11, no one ever wrote an article about Dick Dillin or his work.

Most of the younger fans know that he's the man who pencilled *Justice League of America* and several Superman-Batman stories in *World's Finest Comics* as well as occasional Superman team-up tales in *DC Comics Presents*.

Most of us older fans grew up reading with fascination the *Blackhawk* stories he drew in the fifties.

Dick Dillin cannot be replaced, and he will be sorely missed by his family, his co-workers at DC, and his fans.

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NEW EISNER BOOK & PORTFOLIO

Denis Kitchen and Cat Yronwode, the publisher/editor and associate editor of the Kitchen Sink *Spirit* magazine, are preparing a book collection of "old and unusual," and mostly unknown art by Spirit creator Will Eisner. The book will cover an extremely wide variety of material, ranging from *The Spirit* itself through the adventure series *Hawks of the Sea* and the armed forces comedy strip *Joe Dope* to work Eisner did for his high school literary magazine. There will be a great deal of mid-1930s Eisner art as well as sample material he did in the 1940s for comic books that were never published. Kitchen will publish the book, and it is hoped that it may be out as early as June 2, which is the fortieth anniversary of the debut of *The Spirit*.

Kitchen has started a new company, Hollybrook Graphics, which will produce limited edition quality portfolios. The first, which will become available either this month or next, is a portfolio by Eisner depicting moral dramas and tableaux of everyday life all set in the inner city.—P.S.

SPECIAL CEREBUS PLANNED

Dave Sim is keeping to his new monthly schedule for *Cerebus the Aardvark* with issue 17 entitled "Champion" due out the third week of May.

"I've decided to move Cerebus outside for a while. You need a ruler to draw buildings," says Dave. Five of the last six issues took place in urban settings.

The proposed eighty-page *Swords of Cerebus* reprint book will be one of the monthly issues, probably June or July. Final details are still being added to the issue, which will reprint the first three Cerebus stories with possibly a new shorter story. Sim is completing a new cover for the special issue.

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John Buscema's pencil rough for the upcoming Superman/Spider-Man book.

DRACULA, TIME WARP CANCELLED

Marvel has announced the cancellation of its *Tomb of Dracula* magazine, as well as *Shogun Warriors*; while DC is dropping *Time Warp* and *All-Out-War* from its schedule.

Tomb of Dracula's last issue will be #6. The new *Lilith* series co-written by Lynn Graeme and Ralph Macchio, debuts in the last two issues, and may continue elsewhere. Gene Colan drew the first story, and Bill Sienkiewicz the second.

Shogun Warriors will be cancelled with issue 20. The Fantastic Four will guest star in the final two issues.

Time Warp's demise comes with issue 5 and it will be replaced with a new monthly *Mystery in Space* to be edited by Len Wein, with covers by Joe Kubert. Stories originally intended for *Time Warp* will appear in the new *Mystery in Space*, which picks up with issue 111.

The last issue of *All-Out-War* will be #6. *G.I. Combat* becomes a dollar comic with issue 212.

THEATRE LIFE WITH ROBINSON

AT "SUGAR BABIES"

To inaugurate the new feature "Theatre Life with Robinson," PLAYBILL asked Jerry Robinson, a well-known social satirist whose political cartoons appear in leading newspapers throughout the country, to visit the Mark Hellinger Theatre and report on *Sugar Babies*.

Like nearly everyone else who has seen the sumptuous musical in which Mickey Rooney, Ann Miller and a chorus of beautiful "sugar babies" recreate the heyday of vaudeville, Jerry was enchanted.

We believe his drawings, captioned with lines from the show, reflect the exuberant fun and bawdy innocence that are at the heart of *Sugar Babies*.

©1980 American Theater Press, Inc.

Mickey Rooney

The first installment of Jerry Robinson's new feature for Playbill, the program book of the Broadway theaters. Long-time comics readers will remember Robinson as one of the premier artists in the business who, among other things, created the Joker.

S & SF ART EXHIBITION

The first major exhibition of fantasy and science fiction illustrative art is being held at the renowned New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, Connecticut. The exhibition which began February 23rd has been extended through April 27th and features the work of twenty-four artists. Among those represented in the 120 painting exhibition are Hannes Bok, Frank Kelly Freas, Tom Canty, Michael Kaluta, Robert Gould, Boris Vallejo, Don Maitz, Roy Krenkel, Michael Whelan, Rowlina Morrill, Charles Vess, Steve Hickman and others.

The New Britain Museum houses the largest collection of American illustrative art in the country and this exhibition, geared toward book cover illustration, represents a breakthrough in the stigma attached to fantasy and science fiction illustration in art circles.

Chimeria Distributing of Farmington, Connecticut will be releasing four prints to commemorate the exhibition: two by Don Maitz and two by Rowlina Morrill. One of the Maitz paintings, "The Road to Corlay," won a silver medal in 1979 from the Society of Illustrators.

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THOR EPIC CONCLUDED WITHOUT THOMAS

Due to his other work Roy Thomas has given up writing *Thor* with issue 297 without concluding the Eternals/Ring of the Nibelung epic began a year and a half ago. Mark Gruenwald and Ralph Macchio are writing the denouement in issue 300 after Macchio scripts 298, and Gruenwald 299, over Thomas's plots. The art on issue 300 will be by Keith Pollard and Tom Palmer.

Referring to the forthcoming 300th issue, Gruenwald commented, "In a year like 1980 in which a lot of special double-size issues are being done, it really takes a lot to think of something that will be special among the specials. There are only so many ways one can out-cosmic the other guys. Fortunately, with Roy's groundwork, I think we managed to put together an epic that lives up to its name."

Among other things, *Thor* 300 will conclude the adaptation of Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, reveal the origins and purposes of the Destroyer, the Odinsword and the pact between Odin and the Celestials, furnish new information about the reasons for the Celestials' presence on Earth, and at long last reveal the identity of Thor's mother. Nine more of the "Young Gods" will be added to the three from *Thor* 203, and the Celestials will finally deliver their judgment of Earth.

Macchio says that Kirby's *Eternals* contained "great, powerful images" and "awesome, dominating characters" that combined to make up "the essence of what made superhero comics great." They are considering doing more stories with the Eternals eventually in *Marvel Two-In-One*. -P.S.

STAR WARS SEQUEL BONANZA

Marvel's adaptation of the sequel to *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, will be released in May in four separate formats: a Super Special, a Treasury Edition, a paperback book published by Marvel itself, and the first part of a six-part serial in Marvel's regular *Star Wars* comic book. Each version will be slightly different from the others. For example, the adaptation in the monthly comic will altogether have five splash pages and three additional pages that are not in the other versions. The Super Special and the paperback will have different covers.

The script for the adaptation is by Archie Goodwin, and the layouts by renowned artist Al Williamson. Williamson and Carlos Garzon both worked on the finishes with some assists from Rick Veitch, who also did most of the lettering.

Goodwin found working on *Empire* to be "one of the most pleasant experiences" he has ever had in doing film adaptations. Lucasfilm was "very cooperative" and provided Marvel with a full final shooting script and a large number of pictures from the film to work from. Security on the content of the film has been strict: Goodwin had to sign an agreement not to divulge any of the story. He does say that the second film attempts to do more with characterizations and relationships than the first—P.S.

STRIP REPRINT MAGAZINE DEBUTS

Chapters, a new monthly magazine reprinting classic newspaper strips of the past as well as showcasing new work in comics and adventure stories in prose, is scheduled to begin publication this month. The twenty-eight page tabloid is being published by Leo Giroux Productions of Medford, Massachusetts and is being edited by Richard Howell and Carol Kalish.

Unless otherwise noted, each issue will contain six dailies and one Sunday page of the following strips:

Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*, beginning in 1938. In addition, *Chapters* will feature the never before reprinted 1935 Sunday sequence which introduced the Dragon Lady, starting with the earliest available pages.

E.C. Segar's *Thimble Theatre* (Popeye), beginning in 1931. Dailies only.

H.G. Peter's and Charles Moulton's little-known *Wonder Woman* newspaper strip from 1942—43. Dailies only.

Peter O'Donnell's and Enrique Romero's *Modesty Blaise*, probably beginning with the 1978 adventure "Cry Wolf."

Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie*, beginning in January 1929.

Leonard Starr's *On Stage* (*Mary Perkins*) from the very beginning of the strip in February 1957.

Russ Manning's *Tarzan*, from 1968. Dailies and possibly Sundays.

Frank Robbins' *Johnny Hazard*, from 1946 and the beginning of the strip's third storyline.

Gus Arriola's *Gordo*, from 1955. Dailies only.

There will also be eight pages of new comics, in the form of rotating series, which will give exposure to amateur comics writers and artists.

There will also be three to four pages each issue of a new serialized adventure novel in prose, done in the style of the old pulps.

Chapters fills the gap in strip reprinting since the demise of *The Menomonee Falls Gazette*, which now appears in abridged form in *The Comic Reader*.

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LYNN GRAEME ON MARVEL MAGAZINES

It is unlikely that any other comics professional has had quite as diverse and colorful a background as Lynn Graeme, who took over editorship of the Marvel magazines last August. She had never worked in comics before, but has edited and co-owned what she describes as a radical political tabloid magazine in Detroit. She worked on several newspapers, once ran a radio advertising business, spent five years as public relations director for a professional children's theatre company and has given lectures on how to teach children to read and write through the use of poetry. Graeme has co-authored a play, *Hurray for Me*, which has been performed at Washington's Kennedy Center and throughout the country, and just finished writing a book with Marcia Powell about managing money for vacations, entitled *The Honeymoon Handbook*. Currently she is working on a novel set in both America and Europe during World War I. To top all that, in her teens she was a professional singer, and in 1967 had the number one hit record in Brazil, "As the Clouds Rode By."

Graeme says she did not find it hard to adjust to working in comics, and entered the field without any preconceptions about it. She read some of the previous Hulk and Dracula stories, and all of the *Howard the Duck* books, which she likes, but sees no need to try to learn all there is to know about the Marvel universe of characters. Rather, she relies on advice about handling the characters from her co-workers and her assistant editor Ralph Macchio.

New look for mags

One of Graeme's goals is to make her books look more like "real magazines." She wants to introduce different styles of art than what mainstream comics readers are used to, as in the new back-up series for *The Hulk!* and *Howard the Duck*. As for the writing, Graeme asserts that comics stories are "another branch of literature" and good ones follow "the same rules as good literature." There should be a "good sense of structure" and the characters should be "real people" with "believable motivations." As a result, she says she is spending a "lot more time on plots" for the magazines than has been spent in the past.

Tomb of Dracula is being cancelled with issue 6; however, if sales figures improve on the last issues, it may be revived. If and when *Tomb* returns it will be with a new supporting cast and an emphasis on the "monstrous" side of Dracula's personality. The new Lilith, co-written by Graeme and Ralph Macchio, will be a "totally different character from Dracula." Angel is being written out and a wholly new approach will be taken in the series, but, Graeme says, it will retain "Steve Gerber's ironic tinge."

Gene Colan is now the regular penciller on *The Hulk!* magazines, and various writers, including some new ones, will work on the series. Graeme wants the stories to be like those on the TV show in handling "more adult" material than the four-color comic, but with a faster pace than the show or previous stories in the magazine. Science fiction elements will rarely appear. She hopes to give the magazine "a bold graphic look," get some different artists for the covers, and to run more text stories.

Graeme wants the stories to emphasize the Hulk's "personality, his thinking and relationships." For example, one upcoming tale will show the Hulk forming a bond with a retarded young man, whom he finds similar to himself.

The back-up feature in *The Hulk!* will be *Dominic Fortune*, co-plotted by Denny O'Neil and Howard Chaykin, with script by O'Neil and full-color boards by Chaykin which O'Neil likens to paintings. The series will be set in 1937 and, according to O'Neil, is "aimed at a relatively sophisticated audience." An upcoming story will involve Fortune with zombies in a Manhattan funeral parlor.

Shooter writes "model" stories

Jim Shooter and John Buscema have done what Graeme calls a "very poignant" *Hulk* story for issue 23, and Shooter has collaborated with Gene Colan on two *Dracula* stories as well. These two stories are connected but each can stand by itself. The first will appear in *TOD* 6, and the second may end up being printed in *Marvel Preview*. Shooter himself says that these three stories are the first he has done at Marvel that "came out pretty much as I intended" and are "reasonable samples of how I write." Shooter states that the three stories "represent

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HEAVY METAL NEWS

The June issue of *Heavy Metal* features a cover by H.R. Giger, art designer for the film *Alien*, and a Gallery section on his work. There will also be a new story by Caza entitled "Shipwreck," and the next installments of the serials "Champakou," by Jeronaton; "Professor Thintwhistle." by Stiles and Lupoff; "Changes," by Matt Howarth; "Rock Opera," by Rod Kierkegaard, Jr.; and "The Alchemist Supreme," by Goddard and Ribera.

Heavy Metal has launched a new advertising campaign in New York City subway stations using posters reprinting the entire story "New Ark City" by Caza from one of the last summer's issues.

MARSCHALL WRITING THREE BOOKS

Rick Marschall, former editor at Marvel Comics, is currently writing and compiling artwork for three books dealing with newspaper comic strips.

For King Features, he is compiling material for a 50th anniversary edition of *Blondie*, which will include reproductions from the strip, stills from the various movies and interviews with the current creative team: Dean Young, and Jim Raymond, the strip's artist, and brother of Alex Raymond.

Dover Books has commissioned Mr. Marschall to write books about the cartoons from turn of the century magazines such as *Punch, Judge* and *Life*; and another treating old comic postcards such as *The Yellow Kid, Happy Hooligan* and *Buster Brown*.

Mr. Marschall's previous credits include *The Sunday Funnies* among others.

EPIC 2 PREVIEW

The second issue of Marvel's *Epic Illustrated* will have a cover by Richard Corben and the first installment of a four-part adaptation of Robert E. Howard's *Almuric*, written by Roy Thomas and drawn, inked and colored by Tim Conrad. Samuel Delany and Howard Chaykin have contributed a story entitled "Seven Moons' Light Casts Complex Shadows." Chapter four of Jim Starlin's twelve-to-fifteen part *Metamorphosis Odyssey*, "Wh'spar," will be printed with the first half in black and white and the second half in color. Craig Russell's "Siegfried" adapts the tale of Siegfried's battle with the dragon Fafnir from Richard Wagner's opera of the same name. There will also be an interview with *Buck Rogers* and *Galactica* producer Glen Larsen by Steve Squires, a two-page piece of fiction called "Hope's End" written by Marv Wolfman and illustrated by Daina Graziuinas, and eight-page color story by Steve Bissette and Rick Veitch titled "Monkey See," a comics story by Ernie Colon titled "The True Game," a text piece on "Fantastic Art in European Comics" by Maurice Horn, and "a couple of surprises."

Street Peeple, the new back-up feature for the Howard the Duck magazine, by Lynn Graeme and Ned Sontag. From left to right: Moonchild, Horsemeat, Cheyanne, Riff and Qwami.

my thinking" on story structure and plot, and that he is "content to be judged on" them.

Recipe for "Duck"

Graeme wants *Howard the Duck* to be a satirical book and feels it is getting better. She is neither attempting to follow in Steve Gerber's footsteps on the series, although she enjoys his Duck stories, nor to made a radical departure from his work.

Upcoming in *HTD* is the "Famous Artists' Duck Portfolio," made up of Marie Severin's "The Cheap Ducktective," Howard in "Curse of the Mummy" by John Byrne, Walt Simonson's "Snailien," in which Howard meets a snail-like alien, John Romita, Sr.'s "Duckman," featuring Duckgirl and the Duckmobile, and a portrait of Howard and Beverly as Astaire and Rogers by Howard Chaykin.

In issue 8, Howard, Beverly and Man-Thing find themselves in a Florida town patterned after a game of Monopoly, in a story drawn by Colan. Howard will not waddle for president in 1980, but a storyline will be set up leading eventually to his making a movie in Hollywood, and still later to the interruption of his and Beverly's wedding ceremony by Dr. Bong.

The magazine will have a new backup feature, "The Street Peeple" (sic), written by Graeme and drawn by Ned Sonntag, which will poke fun at life in the 1960s.

Short Subjects

Marvel

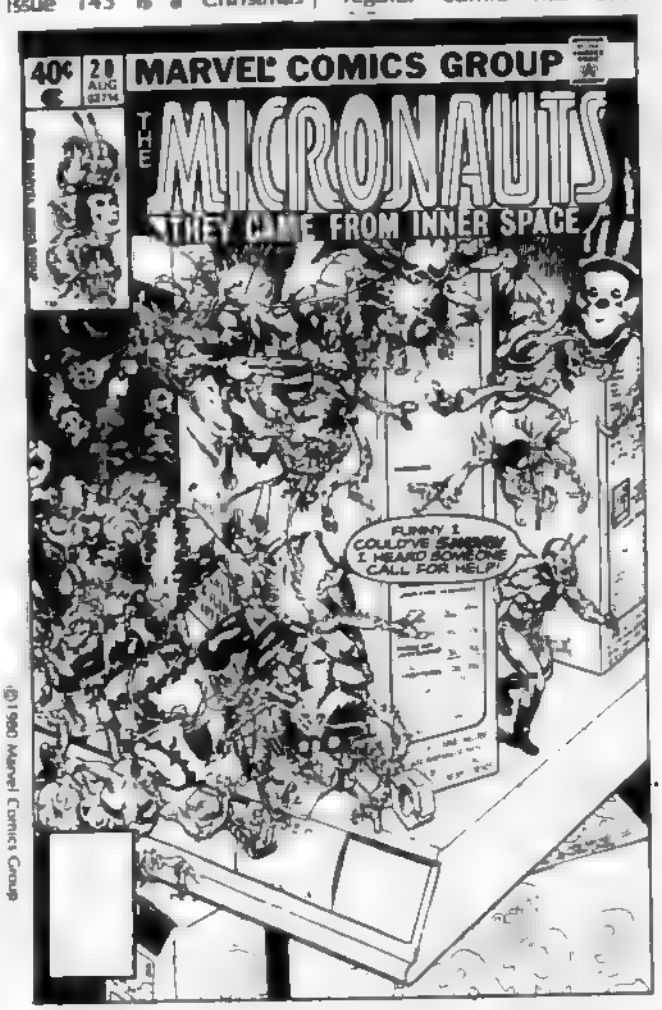
- Doctor Strange will guest star in the 1980 *X-Men Annual*, which will be pencilled by John Romita, Jr., inked by Klaus Janson and written, as usual, by Chris Claremont. In its story, "Nightcrawler's Inferno," the X-Men invade a sorceress's recreation of hell.

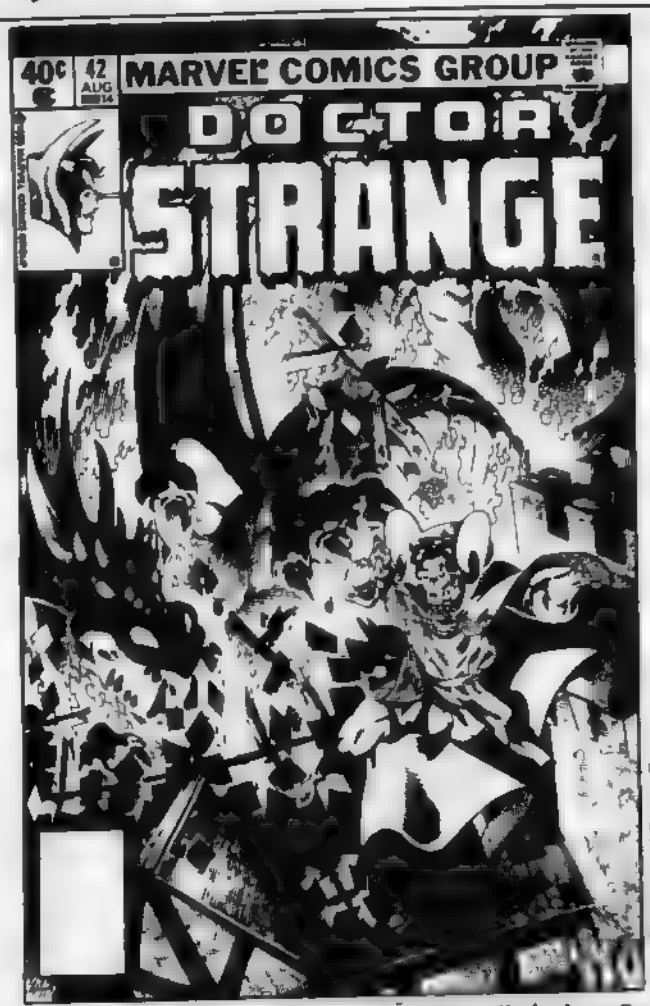
- Kitty Pryde will join the X-Men at the close of issue 138. In 139-140 Wolverine and Nightcrawler go to Canada to team up with Vindicator, Shaman and Snowbird of Alpha Flight. Issue 141 begins another two-parter which starts with Kitty's first session in the Danger Room and leads directly to the X-Men's battle to prevent the assassination of both a presidential candidate and Professor Xavier in Washington, D.C. Issue 143 is a Christmas story featuring a solo adventure for Kitty

- Marvel's forthcoming St. Francis of Assisi biography will have breakdowns by John Buscema and finishes by Marie Severin. Mary Jo Duffy is writing the book in cooperation with Father Roy Gasnick of the Franciscan Communication Board. There will be forty-four pages of story, plus text pages, maps and a wrap-around cover. The book will be available in late August or early September but will be marketed principally in cooperation with religious organizations. Although the book will probably not be sold at newsstands, some will probably be distributed to comics specialty shops.

- Bill Sienkiewicz is the new regular artist on *Fantastic Four*.

- The start of the Dazzler's regular comic has been postponed while negotiations proceed on a possible movie of the character.





- The first *Doctor Who* story to appear in Marvel's American books will be in *Marvel Premiere* 57 reprinting a British story.

- John Byrne has devised the concept for a new *Nova* series, which will receive a one-issue tryout in *Marvel Spotlight*. It will be co-plotted by Byrne and Mark Gruenwald, with Byrne drawing and Gruenwald scripting.

- Bill Mantlo and Steve Ditko are doing a three issue *Marvel Spotlight* story featuring Captain Universe from *The Micronauts*. *Spotlight* will also run a *Vision* series by Roger McKenzie and Mike Nasser.

- A new *Ka-Zar* comic is being planned, to be edited by Louise Jones, written by Bruce Jones (no relation), and pencilled by Brent Anderson.

- Roger Stern and Herb Trimpe combine forces for the 1980 *Marvel Team-Up* Annual, which stars the Hulk, Power Man, Iron Fist and Machine Man. Spider-Man will appear in only a few panels.

- Marvel editor Al Milgrom would like to start a new comic that would combine the romance genre with another field of comics stories. One possibility, which may receive a tryout in *Marvel Spotlight*, is romance stories involving Marvel superheroes. There would be two or three stories per issue and Milgrom would like to use fan favorite artists: for example, he hopes to get Mike Golden, Walt Simonson and Frank Miller for the book. When possible, Milgrom would like to have the regular writers and artists for the characters do the stories involving them.

Short Subjects

DC

- George Perez becomes regular penciller on *Justice League* beginning with issue 184.
- Steve Ditko penciled the first 25 page *Legion of Super-Heroes* story, a fill-in written by J.M. deMatteis and inked by Bob Wiacek which will appear in issue 268. The cover will be drawn by George Perez and Terry Austin. Ditko will probably also pencil the second part of a forthcoming two-parter by Gerry Conway which introduces a new Legionnaire and brings back the Fatal Five.
- Mike Kaluta has drawn covers for the upcoming *Ghosts* 93, *Unexpected* 203 and *Secrets of Haunted House* 29, all on sale in July.
- Michael Fleisher and Ross Andru have developed a new Western character who will first appear in *Jonah Hex* 42-44, and receive his own monthly book shortly thereafter.
- Another new series, this one supernatural and called *Mr. E* has been created by Bob Rozakis and Jack C. Harris. It will debut in the December *Secrets of Haunted House*, with art by Dan Spiegle. Spiegle will also be drawing the *Nemesis* back-up feature in *Brave and the Bold* which will be scripted by Cary Burkett.
- Don Heck will both pencil and ink *The Flash* starting with issue 291.
- DC managing editor Joe Orlando will be looking for new artists for DC at this summer's comics conventions.

GENERAL

- Noted cover artist Boris Vallejo has been commissioned by Coca-Cola to produce four paintings which will be available as posters in conjunction with *The Empire Strikes Back*.
- A never before reprinted 1941 adventure from Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* has now been published in book form by the Museum of Cartoon Art in association with the Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News Syndicate in order to raise money for the museum. Enfitled *Raven—Evermore?*, the book contains the story that culminates with the death of Raven Sherman and features an introduction by Caniff. Until May 1, the volume will be available from the museum for only three dollars plus fifty cents for mailing charges. Anyone interested should write the Museum of Cartoon Art. CTNYNS BOOKS, Comly Ave., Port Chester, New York, 10573.
- Jack Kirby's adaptation of the Disney science fiction film, *The Black Hole* for Sunday newspaper comics sections, is currently being serialized in *The Science Fiction Times*, a new monthly publication by the Boston-based science fiction magazine, *Galileo*. Each issue contains four installments out of the total twenty-six, printed in four color on special white offset stock. The serial began in issue 6; the current issue is number 8. Only three other newspapers have run the strip, and *The Science Fiction Times* is the only one to be printing it uncut.
- Rudy Nebres is completing his first portfolio, entitled "Creatures of the Night" containing six black and white plates. Tentatively scheduled for an August release, the portfolio is being published by Artemis, who released the Boris Vallejo portfolio last year.
- Tempo Books upcoming paperback reprints of recent comic strips include, in April: *Rick O'Shay*, May: *Popeye* #2 and *Broomhilda* #1, and June: a collection of the *Hulk* strip.
- Pocket Books has released the first paperback collection of *Spiderman* newspaper strips. The volume contains the first two adventures in the strip, which involve Doctor Doom and Doctor Octopus.
- Comic Art Publishing Company has issued the fourth volume of its reprintings of Milton Caniff's *Steve Canyon* from the strip's beginning. In this collection Canyon encounters "Maid Nine and Convoy."
- G.B. Trudeau's latest *Doonesbury* collection, now on sale, is *A Tad Overweight, but Violet Eyes to Die For.*
- *Visions* #2 is being released this month and includes a 25 page "Lightrunner" strip, and new art by Adams, Rogers, Krenkel and Kenneth Smith. The publisher Lamar Waldron reports that *Visions* will new be on a quarterly schedule.

News Commentary

THE END OF THE DREAM by Bob Jennings

The following is a commentary by Bob Jennings on the announced price hike by DC and Marvel. The opinions expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Comics Feature.

About the same time most of you read this, the major comic book companies will raise the retail price of comics from 40¢ to 50¢ a unit. It's a hell of a situation. This means that we will all have to dig a lot deeper into our wallets to continue buying our favorite titles, and if you're like most fans, you'll probably be cutting back and eliminating a few titles you have been buying regularly, but which haven't really been holding your interest lately. For most fans and serious collectors the new price hike will mean some reshuffling, a few adjustments, and a lot of grumbling. But for the comic book industry as a whole, the new fifty cent cover price spells the beginning of the end of the comic book as a marketable literary form.

Every time there has been an increase in the cover price of comic books, there has also been a sharp and immediate drop in the total readership of comics in general, a loss which has never been recaptured, even after the initial shock period has worn off. With comics now taking the largest single price increase in the entire history of the format, it will be interesting to see what this is going to mean several years down the road.

We are told that the price increase was necessitated by increased production costs. Certainly inflation is an ugly fact of life today. Gasoline costs $1.25 a gallon, hamburger goes for two bucks a pound, and a three cent postage stamp now sells for 15¢. However there is one very significant area to which inflation has not extended. This is the weekly allowance structure of most American youngsters. When OPEC hikes the price of crude another five dollars a barrel and the cost of living index goes up, you and I can demand a pay raise from the boss to help offset the pain. But according to a survey done by the National Education Association, the allowance structure for grammar school-aged children has not changed noticeably during the past twelve years.

This means that kids today are still struggling along with the same dollar or two dollars a week that their older brothers and sisters got before them, despite the fact that everything kids enjoy spending money on costs much more today. The new price increase on comics means that even if a youngster is interested in spending *all* his allowance on comic books, simple economics will force a quantity cutback. At the very *least*, we can look for an across the board drop in sales equal to the percentage of the price increase, a rather sharp and brutal 25%. As bad as that may seem, I suspect in actuality the loss in sales will be considerably higher. In the past kids have traditionally made room for as many childhood vices as they could possibly afford on the limited funds available to them. If candy bars are now selling at twenty-five cents each, and the Saturday monster matinee now goes at $1.50 a showing, this means discriminating kids on a tight budget will buy even fewer comics than ever before due to the increased cost of the competition.

As crippling as this sales loss may be in the short run, when we look at the future things get even worse. Comic book buyers can be broken down roughly into three broad categories and three distinct age groupings. Youngsters under the age of twelve, the same group on a weekly allowance, have tended to be random sample buyers, that is, they have tended to buy a great many kinds and titles of comics, with no strong loyalty to any one character or title, and with no special interest in actually collecting comics. They sample the entire spectrum of the comic book market, and as they become older, become more selective.

The random samplers graduate into the second category, the regular readers. This group, which traditionally has included ages twelve through about fifteen, has been the broad backbone of support for the comic industry. This very large group of readers buy their favorite comics on a consistent basis. In the past the peak of sustained interest for regular readers has generally lasted from about a year to three and a half years, after which time most of these readers graduate to cars, dope and heavy dating, leaving comic books behind them forever.

The third grouping, which has become increasingly more significant in the past ten years, consists of serious collectors and heavy readers. These are comic buyers who continue to buy comics on a steady basis with a high degree of loyalty well after their peers have shed the habit. Many of these serious collectors come in contact with comics fandom, and an uncertain percentage may become active to some degree within fandom.

The latter two groupings, the regular readers and the serious collectors, are extremely important to the comic book sales picture, because these people spend money over extended periods of time on a consistent basis. Their support is vital to the monthly production of comics featuring continued characters.

What will happen when this vital evolutionary chain is interrupted? In this case the problem begins with the random samplers, the younger readers facing a heavy increase in the price of comics with a very low fixed amount of money to spend on them. In the short run it means a drastic cutback in the number of comics they can afford to sample, but over the long run it means that a very large percentage of these youngsters will never get the opportunity to sample enough comics to develop a taste for specific titles and thus they will never become steady readers or collectors.

This is the real long term danger. There is an inherent growth factor in comic book reading which will be interrupted by the price increase we are now facing. If a large and significant percentage of the children who traditionally sample comics never get the opportunity to develop into regular readers, the long term cumulative effects on comic book buying patterns will be nothing short of disastrous.

There is an even more interesting sideline to all of this, which the companies also neglected to consider when they raised the price of comics. When comics sold for a quarter, or even thirty-five and forty cents, the public at large viewed them as throwaway literature which could be easily purchased for pocket change. At fifty cents, comics are going to run up against a very significant psychological barrier. Most people regard fifty cents as the beginning point of "Real Money," and when comics cost "Real Money," a lot of casual buyers who browse and pick up occasional titles on a sporadic basis are going to take long hard looks at their purchases. Most Americans have to pay the higher prices for gasoline and food and clothing, but comic books are not an essential commodity.

The fifty cent psychological barrier becomes considerably more important when we look at the distribution side of the comic business. Comic books selling at thirty or forty cents have been traditionally treated as a unique item by regional magazine distributors. They have been regarded as high risk, low retail, high aggravation products. Comic book displays are very difficult to maintain at a retail level, requiring almost constant attention to keep the books straight and to keep the stock in balance due to the constant barrage of incoming titles each week. To make up for the aggravation factors and

the low cashbox ring of comic books, the magazine distributors have traditionally billed comic books into retail stores at a higher profit margin than regular magazines, basically 30% while normal magazines were billed in at a 20% profit.

This extra profit incentive has been considered necessary to entice retail outlets to continue carrying comics on a regular basis. Only now, comics suddenly sell for fifty cents a unit, and virtually every regional magazine distributor in the country has a breakoff point on retail magazines at a fifty cent cover price. Any publication selling for fifty cents or more is considered a regular, legitimate magazine, and as such is billed as a regular magazine, at the lower magazine profit. Except for a few isolated instances, all the fifty cent comics will be billed across the country to retail outlets at a 20% profit margin.

This means that by going to a higher retail price comics have lost a very powerful profit incentive which kept them alive and on display in many retail outlets. With comics now paying the same return on investment as any other magazines, I think we will soon see a great many retail stores dropping their comics entirely. They can get the same rate of return by turning that magazine rack space over to a few more skin mags, or make far more money by replacing the comics spinner rack with high profit impulse novelty items.

In either situation comic books lose. With fewer outlets carrying comics there will be still fewer opportunities to sell to prospective readers, especially young buyers, whether the random samplers or the regular readers.

It all adds up to a pretty grim picture. Going to a fifty cent retail price was a serious mistake in my opinion. In the short term, the first two or three years, there may be no radically adverse effects from the move, but in the long term the readership base which comics must have in order to survive will be seriously eroded and perhaps destroyed. If all of this sounds far-fetched to you, then perhaps you should check a few historic precedents. The dime novel and the pulp magazine both went through exactly the same situations. They increased their cover prices and developed changes in their distribution handling, followed by a steady loss of retail display space and ultimately the death of each of these unique literary formats. So far as I can see, comic books are blindly following the same course straight down the road to oblivion. Comics now cost fifty cents each. All in all, I think we can kiss the funnies goodbye. ■

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Comics Feature Interview:

David Michelinie and Bob Layton

David Michelinie and Bob Layton are one of a growing number of regular writer-artist teams in comics. At DC, they worked together on Star Hunters, and at Marvel, the revamped Ant-Man and the continuing saga of Iron Man.

Individually, Michelinie assumed the writing of Swamp Thing after Len Wein, and also wrote Unknown Soldier for DC. At Marvel, he is currently writing The Avengers and various fill-ins of other series.

Layton began his comics career at Charlton Comics. In addition to his work with Michelinie, he has inked or done the finished artwork on many books including All-Star for DC and the 1978 Hulk annual for Marvel. He also has drawn a number of covers for Marvel.

The following interview was conducted in March by Frederick Marcus and Dean Mullaney, and we'd like to thank Comicrypt in Collingswood, New Jersey for their hospitality.

FEATURE: With Marvel adding five pages to each story, how will that affect your storytelling and do you think you'll be able to tell better stories with five more pages?

MICHELINIE: It's bound to affect the telling of the story in some way. It depends on whether Jim Shooter allows us to use the space for larger pictures or requires something actually constructive, like more characterization. It's a tremendous opportunity for adding characterization. You can do more bits with the characters. In seventeen pages you can perhaps have a page for an incident to occur; when you have twenty-two pages you can expand the characterization to a page and a half, or two pages, and do follow up reactions and things you couldn't really afford to spend space on before.

It also depends on the story, on the situation. I go about writing *The Avengers* from a character point of view. The focus is generally on the characters, so there will probably be more of that.

FEATURE: Have the editors told you anything about what they'd like in terms of extra plot or extra characterization?

MICHELINIE: What we've been told by Jim Shooter is that he wants to have twenty-two page stories. Not fill-ins and not back-ups. We have not been told what to do within those twenty-two pages, just as we haven't been told what to do within seventeen pages. It's up to the writer; it's up to the editor.

FEATURE: It would seem that in a group book such as *The Avengers*, the additional five pages would allow more room for characterization since you have to get so much action in the seventeen pages, show all the characters . . .

MICHELINIE: You don't have to have so much action. I was talking with Jim Shooter just recently and he said that he doesn't want gratuitous violence. *The Avengers* #194 had no fighting whatsoever and he loved that story. There's conflict, there's emotion and there's movement. There's conflict between the characters, there's the dynamism between the reactions of the characters to their situations and there doesn't necessarily have to be punching and kicking and hitting.

FEATURE: Bob, is there going to be any strain on you to turn out the additional pages per month?

LAYTON: Yes, for both of us actually. David has two books to worry about. On the other hand, I'm really untried as a regular penciller, so I don't know. As of *Iron Man* #137 I'll be the regular penciller and right now I'm building speed and hope that I'll gain enough speed so that it won't present a big problem for me.

FEATURE: You'll be doing the complete art?

LAYTON: Exactly. I'm one of the few people at Marvel who's doing the whole thing himself. Right now we're two plots ahead and until we start banging it out regularly more or less, I don't know. I'm going to try like hell because I really want this book to make it. This is what I wanted all along: the chance to use my abilities to the fullest, plotting it with Dave and doing the pencils and inks.

I'm just getting started. I can see an improvement from #137 to #138 and I'm hoping that by the time I get into the mid-140s this stuff is going to be really spectacular. Dave's been really good at pointing out on every page I turn in to him what he feels about the storytelling . . . he holds his nose and says, "This is good!" [laughter]. No, he's been really good about that, pointing out where he feels I took a wrong step here or there, or didn't interpret things right. Fortunately, we work in such close proximity that if there are any changes that have to be made, they can be done quickly. So far it's worked out well.

FEATURE: Do you feel that the extra space will allow you to draw more display artwork?

LAYTON: That's not my primary interest. I know some guys who will say, "I'll draw this very large and I can probably get $20 more for it on the open market." If you're doing something like Iron Man meets the Battlestar Galactica, you don't draw that in ten panels on a page. When you introduce the Battlestar Galactica, you want the artwork to show the scope of what you're dealing with. Twenty-two pages will give us the space to do this. The way we have it now . . .how many single issue stories have you seen? Not many because it's very hard to do a complete story in 17 pages. We tried it in *Iron Man* #130. If there's a big build-up throughout the story and we get to page 14 before the menace appears . . . look out, we've only got three pages left to wrap it up!

MICHELINIE: That was kind of a special case in that that story was not meant as part of the continuity. It was meant as a fill-in. If we were doing a story like that in a continued series, we could have expanded it into the next issue.

FEATURE: David, how difficult do you find it to coordinate the characters in a group book like *The Avengers*, within the book itself and with the characters' appearances in their own books?

MICHELINIE: It's not that difficult with the Avengers because there are only two members who have their own books, one of them being *Iron Man*, which I write. So the only problem, really, is Captain America which is getting to be a slight problem because I'm having Iron Man step down as chairman. The next obvious chairman of the group is Captain America. I asked at the office to have the Cap plots sent to me when they're approved so I can know what's going on in that book. But this hasn't occurred. Basically, this presents a problem because I cannot develop Captain America. I can't do anything with that character because it might be contradictory with something that's going on in his own

The Avengers was the first group book I ever did. I did *Star Hunters* at DC but that was mainly Donovan Flint and friends, a central character and a supporting cast. *The Avengers* is also a very interesting situation for me because it was the first thing I did at Marvel. I came in at a time when Jim Shooter had something like twenty characters and it was a crash course in learning the characters. As I approach an Avengers story, it's "What am I going to do with the characters?" I have to think about the interreactions of the Avengers with each other. It's like, "Okay, what am I going to do with the Beast this issue?" What did he do last issue? What has he done in the past? What are his relationships with the other people? Well, Wonder Man will be doing such and such, and the Beast has a relationship to what he's doing, so I can put those two together. And here's the core of the story—what does their situation have to do with this? I can move them around into the central story. It's generally approached through each of the characters, and then moving them into the story

One thing I've found with *The Avengers*...*The Avengers* gets an incredible amount of mail. It has an incredible following, and most of the readers write in about the people. That's what the readers care for. There is that element that wants the epic story, that wants Ultron to come back, but most of them write about the characters. They want Hawkeye to come back, "Get rid of the Falcon," "Leave the Falcon in." It's very important to approach it that way instead of thinking about what kind of grandiose story I can do. That would get boring really fast. It's difficult for me in that I have not read every Marvel comic in the universe. I have not read every issue of *The Avengers*. Every time I plot, I try to read more. I depend very much on my editors. I try to study the characters and be as true to them as I can with what I know about the characters. I think that's of prime importance in writing the series.

FEATURE: Since you were not familiar with the Marvel

characters at first, and since the readers are so interested in the characterizations, did you find that to be a problem?

MICHELINIE: Yes. What I did, basically, was study the work of the current writer, who was Jim Shooter at the time, and I based my characterizations on what I had read. Every writer who does the book brings his own interpretation. I remember I did a bit with the Vision in the training room and I got three different letters: one from someone saying, "Boy, this stinks. You should do it like Englehart did. He really knew how to handle the Vision;" another letter said, "Boy, this stinks. You're doing it just like Englehart. He didn't know anything;" and a third letter saying, "Boy, that's great. You did the Vision just perfectly." So I have to base the characterizations on what I think were the good characterizations that have been done and follow them according to my feelings. Some people aren't going to like it, but hopefully most of them will, at least if I'm sincere in my writing of these characters, which I try to be

FEATURE: Do you feel limited by the fact that the Marvel characters have been so established by the continuity over the years?

MICHELINIE: Somewhat. I don't feel all that limited in *Iron Man* because I haven't really felt that obligated to treat the character the way he's been treated before. The way he was treated before is fine, but it's not the way I see the character. I've tried my best not to contradict anything that's gone before, and I depend on my editors. We've also established our own cast of supporting characters, so there's no real danger of having Pepper Potts be left-handed instead of right-handed or something like that.

With the Avengers, there are so many characters and so many stories that have been done that it's hard. And I can't do it, not on my own. I am not the "dyed-in-the-wool, face front, true believer" who's read everything Marvel's come out with. I try to be as true to the characters and what they've done before as I can. I depend on people, including the readers who will always tell me every time I do anything wrong. And I try to correct that when I do make a mistake.

LAYTON: Let's tell them what we do with No-Prizes! [laughter] We have a unique method of filing No-Prizes....

MICHELINIE: Yes, we crumple them up into little wads of paper. I'm saving them and I'm going to start my summer barbeque with them [laughter]. I hate No-Prizes because they don't tell me anything. I will get a batch of twenty letters and eight or nine of them will tell me that Ant-Man's left boot was yellow on page 12, panel 3. I know that! I see it before the readers and scream about it when I see it. There's not a damn thing I can do about it. It's a separator error. It's not going to tell me how to do my work better. I'd much rather have letters from people telling me, "Ant-Man was not in character when he spoke to Yellowjacket and said this," or "Yellowjacket really isn't this powerful, is he?" Or on the other side, "This is a really good thing you did with the Scarlet Witch because...." ...things that will help me know how I'm reaching the audience.

FEATURE: The "Demon in a Bottle" sequence in *Iron Man* gathered a lot of attention, and I think you received an award of some kind?

MICHELINIE: We received an award of merit, which I haven't seen yet, from the Institute for Scientific Analysis which covers the treatment of alcohol in the media.

LAYTON: It's really great to get an award from a place you never heard of until you got the award! [Laughter] It's good to get an award, though...from anywhere! We also got a half page write-up in the house journal of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

I went around the country and did a TV show in Washington D.C. and a radio and TV show in Indianapolis...the people who picked up on that particular story. We received a lot of mail, a lot of real interesting mail because when you do something that's even the least bit controversial, you get a lot of really interesting responses. I've been working with Pam Rutt and Mike Friedrich of Marvel's public relations department and they've contacted me about possibly doing more promotion for *Iron Man* later this year. They've been really good about it. I think it's good that Marvel is now taking an active hand in promoting the books rather than just having people go to conventions. They're saying, "Hey, let's start taking our business seriously." There's nothing like working for a group of people who hold the product they produce in contempt, which has been the case with the business people in comics for years. I think now they're starting to say, "Hey, these guys are getting written up in the magazine of H.E.W."

I've done some lectures since then. I lectured at Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania to about 200 students, and it was basically because of "Demon in a Bottle." It was a great experience and I'm going back there later this year. Hopefully more college campuses will open up to it.

I've gotten a lot of good responses. Going to conventions, you're not going to promote...the fans are going to buy these books regardless. If you get out to a college campus or an elementary school...I did a lecture at a ghetto elementary school in Indianapolis and for them it was a big thrill. I grew up in a poor family and I had the chance to say if you really want to do something, if you want to be a comic book artist or a writer, or whatever, just apply yourself. It was a really rewarding experience for me.

OH NOTHING. I WAS JUST WONDERING...
WONDERING?
...WHAT A BODY GUARD WOULD LOOK LIKE IN AQUA CHIFFON...?
TENSION EBBS THE SMILE IS RETURNED...
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group
YES SIR, THAT'S THREE HUNDRED MORE ON-EM
AN ALARM! FROM THE VAULT!
YOU'D BETTER STAY PUT, TONY. I'LL SEE WHAT-
A MAN YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT. LOOK, BETHANY I'M TIRED AND I'M FRAZZLED AND I'M SICK OF YOUR BLAMING MY BODYGUARD FOR A JOB YOU BOTCHED!
WE'VE BOTH GOT STAKES IN THIS GAME LADY, SO ANY TIME YOU JUST DROP IT!
T...TONY...?

FEATURE: Was that story written from the standpoint of a social responsibility, or .

MICHELINIE: I thought it would be a good story. That's the reason I did it. When I took over the book, Tony Stark's girlfriend had left him, his company was being taken over . . . it just struck me that this guy . . .either put him on ABC at 1:30 in the afternoon in his own soap opera, or what would really happen to this guy? He'd go out and get plowed. He's got all these problems; he's got to escape somehow. It seemed logical these days that the way he would escape would be getting into the bottle. I thought that was very logical, very natural. It hadn't been done before to my knowledge and I thought that would be a hell of a nice story. With Bob's input, it just developed and we did it over a period of about a year.

LAYTON: Iron Man was Tony's release. He sits up in his ivory tower and all these people underneath him are vying for power, and the only release he really had was to become Iron Man. Suddenly he puts this helmet on and he becomes anonymous. As Tony Stark he'd sign a piece of paper and a building would go up in Milwaukee, or fifty people would lose their jobs somewhere. And he never sees it. Or even if he sits at a drawing board and designs something, he doesn't have the time to go down and build it. He sends it downstairs and Scott Lang puts it together. He never really sees the product of his handiwork, but he puts on the Iron Man costume and he's anonymous, he can touch hands with people and be one on one. He gets his release that way. When Justin Hammer took away his ability to change to Iron Man, his release was gone. And that's the thing that pushed him over the edge. Like in real life, he started blaming people around him because he refused to accept the blame himself.

MICHELINIE: The villain of the whole thing was Tony Stark. The story got a great deal of positive response. The negative response came basically from people who thought, "You're doing this to a hero. He won't be a hero anymore." But in my mind it made him even more of a hero because he fought the ultimate enemy—himself. As a man, not as Iron Man. To me that makes him even more of a hero, more admirable.

FEATURE: There was some word going around that Hammer was originally supposed to be Doctor Doom . . .

MICHELINIE: What! That was strictly Justin Hammer and I don't know where that rumor popped up. It was involved with the whole alcoholism plotline and it had to do with a new character I wanted to do, whom we ended up calling Justin Hammer because he looks like Peter Cushing.

LAYTON: And I wanted to do Peter Cushing because I'm a fan of his. I love patterning the characters after real people . . .trying to think of them cinematically. If I were doing an Iron Man film I would have Peter Cushing play Justin Hammer. I try to do that with a variety of characters. I recently patterned a character after William Holden, but it's not William Holden, it's a William Holden type. I don't do them exactly.

MICHELINIE: We have a Doctor Doom story that we've wanted to do ever since we got the book, but Marv Wolfman was writing the *FF* and claimed proprietary rights on Doctor doom, and let no one use Doctor Doom

LAYTON: There are these incredible parallels between Doctor Doom and Iron Man. It's like two sides of a coin. Tony's the good, benevolent, powerful knight; Doctor Doom is the other side: he's powerful and nasty. But both of them have a sense of ethics.

MICHELINIE: One uses his abilities and nobility and science for good and the other uses them for evil.

LAYTON: It's something I've wanted to do from when I was a kid. I love Doctor Doom and I love Iron Man. The reason I wanted to do *Iron Man* in the first place was because I really like the character. They never did the kind of things I wanted to do in *Iron Man*. He never looked like metal, really. Not totally. I draw him looking like a '57 Chevy [laughter], really glossed up and everything. And the kind of antagonists he would have: the Melter, Whiplash and Blizzard [laughter]. That's, why we did this story in which they weren't truly

antagonists Iron Man took on all three of them and "squish," because these guys wouldn't give him a decent run for his money. We're talking about a guy who's up there with Thor . . .against a guy with an electronic whip? Now, c'mon, let's get serious for a minute.

Doom is the natural antagonist for Iron Man, even more than the FF, and when our story comes up, it's not going to be like you'd expect.

FEATURE: Do you have any say over the use of your characters in other books?

MICHELINIE: No, not really. For example, Iron Man is currently appearing in *She-Hulk*.

FEATURE: How about the way in which they're handled?

MICHELINIE: It depends on the circumstances. For example, with the *She-Hulk* story I was allowed to read the script, and if I found something that I thought was offensive I could request that it be changed. Bill Mantlo was very good about asking me about using Ant-Man in *Micronauts*, as was Chris Claremont when he uses the Beast in *X-Men*. Then there are times I'll pick up a comic book and there's the Wasp appearing in *Defenders*, or the Scarlet Witch is appearing in *Marvel Team-Up*, and that's the first I hear about it. We have no yes or no powers in saying where the characters can be used. The editors are supposed to coordinate with each other where and how the characters will be used. It works sometimes, it doesn't other times.

LAYTON: Some editors are really concerned with continuity. For example, with the *She-Hulk* in which Iron Man appeared, they contacted me about doing the cover. They didn't have a regular cover artist for *She-Hulk* and because I do all the *Iron Man* covers, they asked me to do it. Anytime I can do anything to keep a visual continuity there, I will.

There are artists who care about continuity, too, just as there are writers. I think the big problem with most of the artists is that they don't really understand what's being written a lot of the time. I try to understand what writing's all about and I try to follow Dave's lead. He's the writer. In that sense we co-plot, but in the last analysis he has to put down what's going down in the story. I can throw him a curve now and then, or add on to what's there . . .Sometimes he'll call for something and I'll see an opportunity to throw a little bit in the background or embellish on what's he's already started, without interrupting the story flow. I think it's important that I pay primary attention to the story itself, and then to the visuals and the characters. I think you get a better product that way.

For instance, in the five issues of *Iron Man* that Jerry [Bingham] did . . .although he's a very good penciller, I don't think he really had a sense of what the strip was all about. He could do the action stuff like Iron Man flying through the fire, but when he got to the part where Tony Stark is standing around in his three-piece Pierre Cardin and talking about the Dow Jones industrial averages, it just fell apart. He didn't seem to have the feel for that kind of playboy lifestyle that is necessary to make it work. J.R: [John Romita, Jr.] had it in his layouts. J.R. really understood the fashions . .the flair that Tony Stark should have as a playboy, that Errol Flynn sort of dashing look, the teeth glittering in the sun sort of thing.

FEATURE: Did you work closely with J.R.?

LAYTON: I developed a rapport with J.R. in that we could anticipate what the other one wanted. His layouts were not supertight but he knew what I would do with them. It's like he was saying, "I know that Bob is really good at this and I'll give him exactly the kind of thing he does well." J.R. had a very rigid, square kind of style and my stuff is very rounded. We evened each other out: I planed his edges and he gave me a little solidity. He's up in the offices and I could go there and talk about the next plot. He didn't sit in on plotting sessions or anything like that, but we talked.

FEATURE: David, is George Perez accessible to you on *The Avengers*?

MICHELINIE: Yeah. Well, he lives in New York and I live in Delaware so we rarely see each other, but last night he called me and we talked twenty minutes on the phone. He gets the plots and sometimes he just draws. In this particular instance it was a verbal plot since the book was late and he asked me about the plot and we worked things out.

Bob and I live about ten minutes away from each other so we'll see each other several times a week.

FEATURE: Do you feel that working closely with Bob on *Iron Man* makes that a better book than a book on which you aren't working as closely with the artist?

MICHELINIE: Definitely. We both like the book. We work together to put out a vision of the way we see the book. It's very rare that you get writers and artists who like what they're doing and like each other and get along. *Swamp Thing* is an excellent example—Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, and Joe Orlando all getting together and just clicking: Walt Simonson and Archie Goodwin's *Manhunter* . . . Archie and Walt are old friends and they got along together. You got really top quality stuff.

When you do a plot and send it to someone whom you've never met, he has no real input. He doesn't know if he's offending you if he changes stuff, and you don't know if you're offending him by giving him stuff he doesn't know how to do or doesn't like to do. It's got to have a positive effect [working closely with Bob].

LAYTON: Today, for instance, I was thinking in terms of this future plotline dealing with Spymaster. I have this concept of him being the ultimate industrial spy. They didn't really work with him before. He was just a throwaway character in the past, and I really want to build him up into the ultimate industrial spy. I worked out this scenario about how he became who he is and so forth and said, "Hey, Dave, what do you think of this?" Eventually we want to flush out heroes and villains alike in terms of what they're all about. And he bought it.

MICHELINIE: For the most part. [Laughter]

FEATURE: How much input does Jim Shooter have?

MICHELINIE: Not a lot. He just kind of leaves us to our own devices.

LAYTON: He just kind of says, "Do more of this." The worst we've ever gotten from Jim was kind of like, "Ehh." [Laughter] He's never really come down on us.

MICHELINIE: When I first took over the book, Jim sat me down and said, "This is what I want, this is how I see the character." He gave me the whole shtick that Stark's a playboy and he should act like a playboy. He shouldn't drive around in a Volkswagen, he should drive around in a Ferrari; he shouldn't wear an old sweatshirt, he should wear the latest fashions. Play the part, think of what he would do if he were a real person. He talked to me very intensely at that point. Since then he has pretty much left us alone on the book, as long as he likes it. He'll make a suggestion here or there . . .the same with the editors—both Roger Stern and Jim Salicrup have pretty much let us do what we wanted.

FEATURE: Do you feel you have to keep up with current fashions to maintain that flair in *Iron Man*?

LAYTON: I buy GQ, the fashion stuff from *Playboy*, anywhere I can find it. My neighbors started giving me pictures of the cars from the latest car magazines . . .I have electronics magazines. I get things like *Cosmopolitan* from Dave's neighbor's trash bins [laughter]. Someone coming to my house must think I'm a transvestite! [Laughter] . . .There's a whole pile of women's magazines. For Ling, I used a really nice evening gown which I got out of *Cosmo*. Basically, I try to keep up with everything. That's what Tony Stark's supposed to be.

FEATURE: Considering that *Iron Man* has always been technologically oriented, do you keep up with the science journals?

MICHELINIE: Bob reads them more than I do. I really haven't approached the science aspect of [the book]. I've been more concerned with Tony Stark, the person in the armor. I was talking with Bob about this the other day and I think we should switch the emphasis slightly more back to Iron Man. My background is in science and science fiction. As far as current technology is concerned . . .the repulsors I defined as particle beam emmission units. I read an article, and this is something that is modern, it works, it's real. When I come across something that we can incorporate into the Iron Man legend, I try to do what research I can to make it as technologically accurate and interesting as possible.

LAYTON: It's like an upcoming plot we have. I don't want to give it away, but the entire thing was based on an article I read in *Science Digest*.

FEATURE: What's going on with Ant-Man? It seemed as though you were really getting into the character.

MICHELINIE: Those two issues in *Marvel Premiere* didn't do very well sales-wise. Ant-Man is very popular; I've used him in *Iron Man* and *Avengers*; he gets great mail. A lot of people want to see him, but they want to see Scott Lang more than they do Ant-Man [laughter], which says a lot about the people who are inside these costumes. I've gotten a plotline approved for another two-part *Ant-Man*. Bob's in on it, and Frank Miller is supposed to pencil.

LAYTON: It's a different approach, a different angle.

MICHELINIE: It develops him more . . .him and his relationship with his daughter. I'd love to do the character as a series but the sales were not great on those two issues of *Marvel Premiere*. I had a long talk with Shooter and he told me all the things he thinks can be done with the character to make it more commericially acceptable, more of the kind of character where a kid reads the comic and wants to go out and be Ant-Man. Eventually that two-part story will show up. Until then Scott Lang is one of the supporting characters in *Iron Man*. He's not going to keep appearing in *Iron Man* all the time, like a sidekick, but Scott Lang will be there. He's an employee of Stark International and we're going to continue developing his character.

LAYTON: The trouble with the original Ant-Man was that Hank Pym is a very boring guy. He may do nice things as Yellowjacket or Ant-Man, but when he took that helmet off, he'd put you to sleep faster than the Congressional Record. Scott Lang, on the other hand, is a very interesting character without the costume. He's a thrill seeker, he stumbled into prison, he stumbled into being Ant-Man. The premise for developing him further is that he's the first regular guy to become a superhero. Ant-Man is incredibly powerful. He can fight Iron Man and possibly beat him. If he wants to he can fly up Tony Stark's nose and turn himself large and blow Stark's head off! [Laughter] Or he can have a thousand ants crawl in your head and eat your brain! [Laughter] He'll send millions of them to their death just to accomplish one thing. They're just bugs [laughter]. He can be incredibly powerful

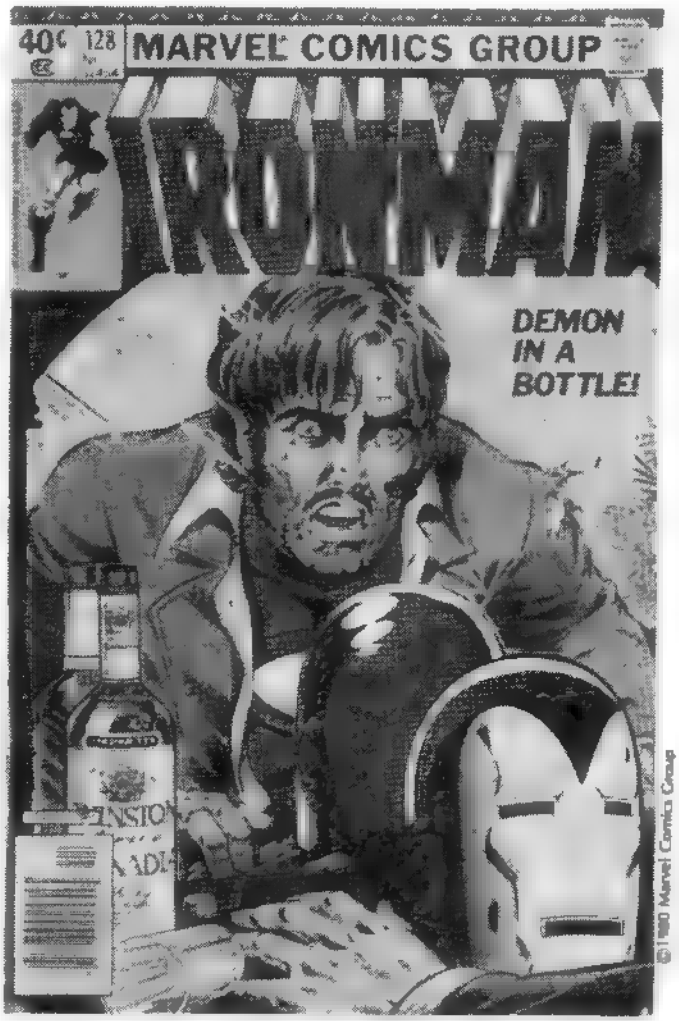
And he's almost inaccessible to large people. The trouble with the layouts in the two *Premieres*, and I think Frank Miller pointed this out, was that everything was seen from our level. It wasn't from Ant-Man's perspective, it was from the reader's eye level. We saw big objects sitting on a regular plane. Well, Frank was talking about . . .you see a guy coming up and it should be from the floor, straight up.

FEATURE: Gil Kane's *Atom* was a lot like that.

LAYTON: Yeah. I think that's what was lacking in terms of the perspective that Byrne took. We lost that immense world that Ant-Man deals with. In fact, this little guy in this immense world has the advantage over everybody.

Frank's got some really interesting ideas in terms of using camera perspectives, so I think the second Ant-Man when it does come out will be better. Frank's going to lay it out and I'm going to do the finishes.

FEATURE: How do you feel about finishing other people's work?



LAYTON: You had to ask that. Generally, I have not been . . .it depends. I really do the work for myself and those professionals around me who appreciate my work. If the fans like it, fine, but that's not a motivation for me doing work. What happens, though, is that a lot of guys I've worked with haven't really cared for what I do on [their pencils] because I will not follow lines, especially in books that I plot. I am the finished artist so if I feel this panel didn't work I feel obligated to change it because I'm the man on the spot. My name is finished artist and the finished art is my responsibility. I've created some antagonism in the past because of that. I make my impression on people's pencils. With J.R. it wasn't that way. J.R. and I didn't fight each other. He would make comments like, "Bob, I think your line needs to be a lot heavier here," or such and such, but for the most part I can't remember getting anything but compliments from him. And I would return them. I think Dave and I got back about 80-90% of what we plotted from J.R. in terms of what we wanted visually.

MICHELINIE: I was very pleased with him.

LAYTON: Very few people can take a plot from a stranger and interpret it almost exactly the way you wanted it to be. On the other hand, with Jerry [Bingham] I wasn't as thrilled working on that stuff as I was with J.R. because I think we got back less from him. Not to put him down, because I respect Jerry a lot. His *Panthers* were really good. It's just that my enthusiasm dwindled because this wasn't what I plotted with Dave, what I conceived visually. That's what led me to pencil the book myself because I thought I had progressed as an artist to the point where I could handle it. I didn't want to do it unless I felt I could do it competently, until I really felt comfortable with my drawing. Hopefully my stuff will continue to progress.

I spent the first four years in the business doing inking, and the last two finishing. I really don't want to do that any more, unless it's somebody I really like to work with. I believe this is a collective business in that no one person really shines. No inker can fix bad layouts. you have to all work together to turn out a good product. Sometimes the blends you get are really interesting, sometimes more interesting than when the person is by himself.

I found inking a great way to learn drawing because you had to analyze everything . . .everything you saw there, you had to interpret those lines to mean something. I learned as I went along. I worked on some pretty good people and I absorbed some of that. Now I'm at the point where I don't really want to work on anybody else's stuff. I want to pencil and ink all my own stuff.

FEATURE: Do you think there should be a training ground for the newer professionals? People seem to be getting their training on the job.

MICHELINIE: Yeah, in essence. For the first ten months I wrote comics, I wrote mystery comics for DC. This was a great training ground because you have two or three stories in the book. I could have written something atrocious but they still had two other good stories and it wouldn't really hurt the overall quality of the book. I was able to make my mistakes and learn from them. There really isn't any place at Marvel for that now. You do a fill-in and you're right there in the big time; or you do a five-page back-up and it sits in the drawer and it's never published, which isn't any good because you need that boost of seeing your work published to give you the impetus to go on and do more work, to learn. DC still has the mystery books; I've seen different names appearing there. I hope that still works, but not only do they need a training ground, they need people to train them. Most of the editors, and I'm not putting any editors down, just don't have the time or take the time to teach people how to write. I assume the art aspect is the same.

LAYTON: There are very few editors who are artists to begin with. I was fortunate to be at DC when Joe Orlando was editing books. He was my only editor and I learned a lot from him. In terms of training, Charlton Comics was good for that when it was still around. That's where I broke in. Byrne and a lot of other guys came through Charlton. Charlton really didn't care; they were just interested in cranking it out and they had tons of mystery books.

Dick Giordano brought a lot of people into the business, myself included, and people like Terry [Austin] and Bob Wiacek. When Charlton was around you could turn out some of the worst drek you've ever seen in your life and as long as they could tell that was supposed to be a figure, they wouldn't throw it out. They didn't pay much, but that was a great place to just experiment. It wasn't quite comics and it wasn't quite fanzines.

Although I never worked as an assistant to Dick, I got more training from him than from anybody because I used to ride back and forth on the trains with him. When I went in to deliver work for Frank Mc Laughlin, when I was working for him, Dick would spend the time there training me, twice a week, two hours in and two hours back. I just got a tremendous input from Dick. Plus, he developed my professional attitude more than anything. I did work for Woody [Wally Wood] for awhile and Woody was great for teaching me some things. Woody's a great simplifier. He can break everything down to its simplest forms. He also has a great sense of black placements. A lot of my black placements come from Woody. Even now I have a tendency to do the Wally Wood double lighting and things like that.

I worked as an assistant to various artists. There's not a lot of that going around now. I have my own assistant now and I'm training him and he's just starting to do some work for Marvel. Should I give him a little plug? His name's Brett Breeding.

FEATURE: DC is adding back-up features to all their books which can be a good place for people to get their feet wet. Do you think Marvel should add back-ups as a training ground?

MICHELINIE: It makes a lot of sense in that it would be wonderful as a training ground. It wouldn't be good commercially. I was talking to Jim Shooter about this a couple of days ago and he thinks one of the advantages that Marvel is going to have is that the stories will be full-length. Whereas if you buy a *Superman* book you get a 17 page Superman story and an 8 page story of someone you probably don't care

about, you buy *Spider-Man* and you get 22 pages of Spider-Man. I think it's very good for the readers.

What you said about the training ground is a very good point. Maybe if Marvel started a book...like, three seven-page stories of characters who don't have their own book, having a series with Quicksilver, or Jack of Hearts who gets a lot of mail. Three different series...maybe *Marvel Three-In-One* or something [laughter]. A training area would be advantageous to the medium.

FEATURE: You say that commercially, full-length stories are advantageous for Marvel. Do you think that in the long run the lack of a training ground will hurt the medium with inexperienced people thrown into the major titles?

MICHELINIE: I don't think so because there aren't that many people coming in to be writers who can write. Hopefully by looking at samples, by giving people a chance, that spark of talent will be spotted, that one out of maybe fifteen or twenty people who can actually write will be given the special treatment they need. Commercially, I don't think it would be viable to throw back-ups into all of the books. However, it might be a good idea to take one or two books and give them back-ups. If you do find that writer or artist who does have a spark of talent, that would give him or her a place to develop. Possibly with a book like *What If* that's regularly double-sized, putting in a four or eight or ten page back-up would be a really good idea.

LAYTON: I think Marvel is more conscious of training than DC is. You talked about people coming in to Marvel...I don't think anybody really comes into Marvel off the streets. Usually they do the route and go to DC and knock out a few mystery stories. At Marvel, they recently had John Buscema come in and give a class to the beginning pencillers. I have the lecture on tape, in fact, and played it for my assistant. The guys just starting out can show up and get lessons. DC never really had an accessible art director, somebody you could go to any time. Joe Orlando was like one. Vinnie [Colletta] was so busy drawing most of the time...he was inking something like seven pages a day and it was very hard to get access to him. Joe would always go over my stuff and talk to me about this or that. But at Marvel you can go to Marie Severin, or Cockrum when he was there. You can go to John Romita, or Jim Shooter. You can go to all these people and get help on what you need.

I know my assistant, when he's gone up to Marvel, has gotten a lot of input from artists who are up there just turning in work or whatever. And Marie Severin is there. She's a very dear lady. When I brought him up there she sat him down and he asked about this or that and she showed him how to do it. "If Bob's way doesn't work, try it this way. There are a lot of different ways of doing it. Find a way that's comfortable for you."

FEATURE: You mentioned before the interview began that you're working on a character of your own for an alternative press. Could you tell us a little about it?

MICHELINIE: I found that we couldn't do our concept in commercial comics with the kind of reality we wanted. How are you going to show a serious character trying to fight crime on its own level, in a world of violence, depravity and gore, in a medium where you aren't allowed to even say "damn" or "hell"?

He's a contemporary character who is a crime killer. If you've read the *Unknown Soldiers* I did, that character's major objective was to stop war. This guy's major objective is to kill crime. Not stop it, *kill* it, destroy it. Utterly. This guy has a bit of a twist in that he's not totally rational.

FEATURE: Is this something you came up with together?

MICHELINIE: Bob had the idea a few years ago when we were at DC working on *Star Hunters* together. I became involved with the character and it became our character. We presented it to DC and if I'm not mistaken they were going to do the character at least as a *Showcase* or in its own book just before we quit the company.

LAYTON: It was a watered down version, of course, of what we really wanted to do. This is a kind of two-level story: there's the adventure story on one level, and on the second level, everybody's kind of symbolic of society in general. You'll be able to draw parallels between these people and what they represent. It's going to be a complete cycle, with about five 30 page stories.

[I guess you can call it] "ground level." If things work out with the publisher it should see print in the fall of this year. I think it's unique because it's based on certain things which have not been dealt with realistically before.

The reason for doing it...Dave and I are heavily into *Iron Man* but we have a lot more ideas than we're allowed to put

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into it. It's like why people like Kaluta and Wrightson leave comics because they find themselves incredibly restricted . . . just by the medium itself because you have a limited audience, you have crappy printing, the characters can't react realistically. The one thing we can't do in *Iron Man* which is so logical . . .we have a playboy in comics who can't sleep with women, a playboy who can't be a playboy in comics. We approached Rick Marschall at one time about doing black-and-white adventures of Tony Stark, which we could do without the Comics Code, and do real action adventure with guns and people talking like real people. But unfortunately, it didn't work out.

We've done two stories in *Iron Man* so far, #126 and #138, which were the adventures of Tony Stark and Iron Man didn't appear at all. We're trying to show that he's a hero. Dammit, whether he wears the armor or not, he's a hero. He's the kind of guy . . .if he's in a situation where the armor is not accessible, he's not going to say, "Oh, I can't be Iron Man. I'll have to let everybody die."

MICHELINIE: Like first *Iron Man* we did, the second part of the story with the Ani-Men, the Ani-Men are punching him around. He does a flip, punches a button on the wall, a picture comes up and there's a bunch of guns. He's into munitions, he knows from guns. He grabs one and blasts away. That's what a person who knows how to take care of himself would do.

LAYTON: Because when he puts that helmet on and you can't see his face at all, you still have to believe that's Tony Stark. To do that you have to establish *his* character. But we're limited in the four-color comics. A character like we've developed for this alternative press wouldn't work in commercial comics to the extent that we want to do it. Even if we could do a black-and-white of this character, we'd lose the copyright on it. Collectively, this thing's been kicking around for six years and if we did it for Marvel, it'd all go down the tubes. He'd be teaming up with Spider-Man, and God knows, he'd join the Avengers. He'd enter the Marvel morass of characters, and I don't want to do that. Besides, this character has a limited range. He goes through these five episodes we have planned and that's it. It wasn't meant to go any further. If we did it in commercial comics it's be a watered down version. It wouldn't have the impact. This is not to put down working commercially because I feel we do as much as we can within those guidelines. But you really get to a point with your art, or your writing, where you want to expand on it, and that's where the alternative press is a good thing. I'm a former publisher myself, with *Witzend, CPL, The Charlton Bullseye* . . .and *Heroes, Inc.*, where the character, when I was originally involved with it, was going to appear. I was going to do it with Woody.

FEATURE: You mentioned before that Dick Giordano helped form your professional attitude. What do you mean by that?

LAYTON: Attitude is very important. I think the reason the people who make it in the business — it may not necessarily deal with their abilities, but there's a kind of stick-to-it-ness idea of "I'm an entertainer. This is my job. I can be creative but I can also be responsible." My first responsibility is to my work and to do it within the guidelines that are set down for me by the people I work for. If you don't like the rules, don't play the game. It's as simple as that. The trouble is that a lot of guys come in [with the attitude that] "I want to do this because I couldn't get the girl in high school, I couldn't make the team, or whatever. What can I do? I can get into comics and people will love me. They will read my stuff, I can say whatever I want and be what I want and have a following." And that's the wrong attitude: the whole idea of getting into comics and "I will be a superhero." When it gets down to it, those people will not last in the business. I've seen a lot of guys I came into the business with who couldn't maintain the diligence.

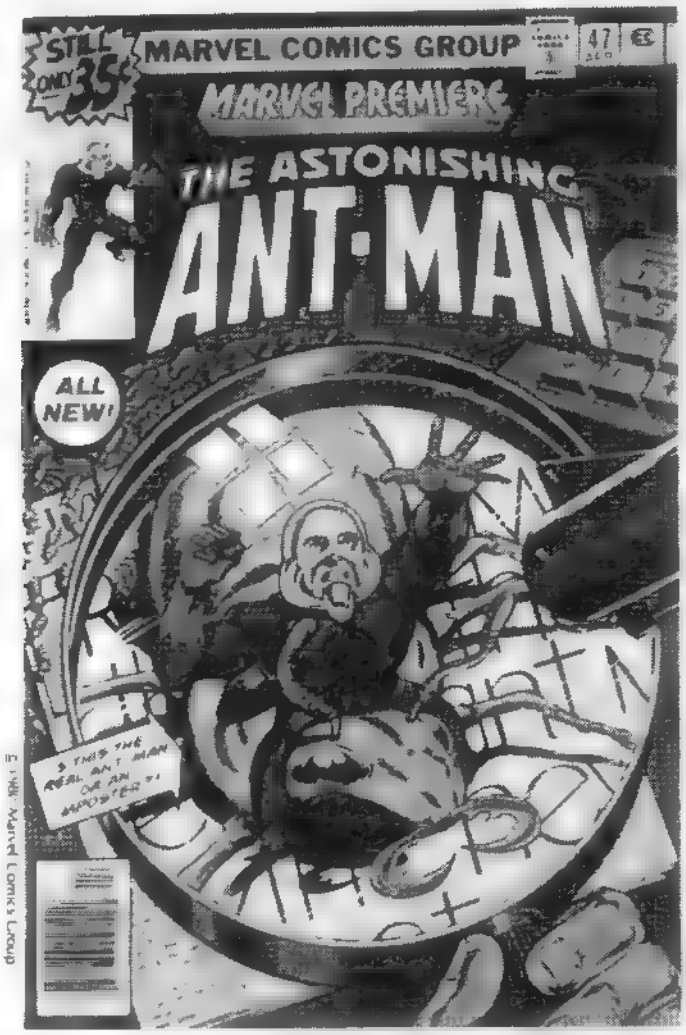
I was very fortunate in that I got a lot of my "attitude training" from Dick Giordano. He's got one of the best professional attitudes of anyone in the business. For a guy to work as long as he has in the business and continue to maintain such a high level of excellence . . .There are a lot of guys who have been in the business who are tremendous artists but cannot relate to the people they teach. At one time these people had fresh attitudes but along the way they changed their minds. By that point in time they were in such demand that they couldn't relate. They'd relate their modified opinions to people just starting out and the trouble is that it makes them disfunctionate. You can't go in to an editor and say, "Godamn it, I want this. You'd better give me this. I won't do any work for you!" They'll say, "Hey, there's the door. We don't need this kind of attitude." You can't go around dropping bombs on people to get what you want. Dick always told me you can't bomb an editor when you want something, you slowly poison him [laughter]. Little by little you knock away at it until he gives you what you want. And it's really true. If you work with an antagonistic attitude about your work, you're doomed to failure.

I think this is important for your readers, those who are interested in getting into comics, to think about. You're doomed to failure if that's your goal. This is a sub-culture and anybody in this business who thinks he's famous is kidding himself. There's only one guy in comics who's famous and that's Stan Lee. The general public knows who Stan Lee is. The rest of us? Forget it. We're known to a sub-culture of college students, elementary school kids and people who live, eat and breathe comics. How many are there? 100,000 people or so? There are people in this business who think they are famous and that's laughable. They live within this small world instead of being a part of the larger world and reflecting that in their work. This becomes their world, and within that world, sure, they are superstars, but it's not reality. And it's hard to deal with these people, and some of them are in positions of power. And I think that's why the work suffers, too, because when you keep borrowing from the same medium all the time, you're not bringing in anything new. That's why you keep seeing Galactus come back every twenty-four issues, because all this stuff is being recycled constantly. They're not getting input from outside. They're not out doing something and absorbing that life experience and relating it. All comics should be is a reflection of real life.

FEATURE: Do you think part of the reason for the lack of new ideas coming into comics is that the people are now more aware of their rights and don't want to give up their ideas without owning them or getting further rewards?

MICHELINIE: I think we should differentiate between ideas and characters. You can't copyright ideas, but you can copyright characters. The reason Bob and I are doing this character for an alternative press and didn't do it for Marvel is because we wouldn't retain the copyright. As far as ideas, I think the reason new ideas aren't coming along is because people aren't having any new ideas [laughter]. It's very, very difficult to be original . . .

LAYTON: It's like what Joe Orlando taught us—You have to take something that people are used to and then not give them what they expect. If you know what's going to happen, it's the most boring thing in the world. In *Iron Man* when he kills the ambassador . . .everybody wrote in and said, "I know what's going to happen. He's going to be wanted by the law." That's not what happened. Instead the cops believe him. He's a hero and he's always shot straight from the hip. That's where you take something people expect and twist it. Maybe it's not originality in that sense, but it's entertaining. It's throwing people curves.



MICHELINIE: I think what Bob said is right. People are incestuous with their creativity, pulling from the comic books instead of from elsewhere. There aren't any original ideas in comic books. You've got to take your original ideas from life, from what's around you and put them into the comics.

LAYTON: Also, part of it is limitations. I think you'd see a lot more original stuff if there weren't such limitations: the Comics Code, good taste (laughter)...if we didn't have a Comics Code, I don't think we would do anything that would offend the entire mass audience. And (you're limited by) the characters themselves, sometimes. Iron Man is in a world of industrial espionage and political manipulation, and it's hard to do space opera in *Iron Man*, for example. You can do it. In fact, we have one planned, but it's a little bit different from the usual.

FEATURE: David, you've written the *Avengers* novel. Would you like to do more prose writing?

MICHELINIE: I would like to do a lot more prose writing, short stories and novels, but the reason I haven't is mainly courage. It takes a lot of courage doing something that you don't know you're going to have some financial remuneration for. The *Avengers* novel I had a contract on which said "You do this work, we'll pay you so much money," but it takes a lot of courage to just give up steady work when you know you have to pay the rent, and write something fulfilling that you don't know if anyone's ever going to read. Plus, I had bad experiences with the *Avengers* novel. A lot of stuff was changed, there were sentences that were made gramatically incorrect, there were sentences changed to mean exactly the opposite of what I wanted them to mean. Plus, it was left off some (of the publisher's) mailing lists and it was very difficult to find. I spent nine solid weeks, twelve to fourteen hours a day working on this thing and it was not available in the stores. Okay, I got paid for it, but so what? I put this work into it, I want people to read it. It was a great experience in that it gave me the experience of writing a novel, it gave me the credit of having written a novel, but there are a lot of negative aspects to it, too, which combined with the courage it takes to do something like that on one's own, is why I haven't done it in the last eleven months since I wrote the *Avengers* novel. But I hope to do it in the future.

FEATURE: Bob, what would you like to do in the future, with your art or in general?

LAYTON: Actually, I'd like to sculpt. It intrigues me, the idea of taking my knowledge of drawing and dynamics and applying it to three dimensions. In comics I don't have to think about the back side of Iron Man when he's flying toward you. It's a two-dimensional object. I like the idea of taking and creating figures that have the dynamics of comics yet are three-dimensional. That's something I'd like to do if I ever get the time.

Within comics, what I'd like to do is write and draw. I would like to try to elevate the level of comics from where it is now to a larger audience. The guys who get disgruntled and quit comics to run off to create the Great Masterpiece is fine and good, and they do beautiful work, but if you want to be a revolutionary, if you want to change the system and the way things are, you've got to do it from within. Outside you're really impotent. That's why I think Neal Adams fails. He has some really great ideas about how to change things and I think he's genuinely concerned about the fact that we don't get paid enough and don't get the respect compared to advertising art, but he's literally outside the business now. All I'm saying is that Neal is the revolutionary working outside the system, and that's why he hasn't accomplished anything. If I want to elevate the level of comics, I'm going to work within the system even though I have to take it on the side of the jaw once in a while. Jobs are going to get screwed up and I'm going to be mad, but I'll get over it and go on to the next job and keep working. I'll try to deal with these people and try to deal with people out there...try to convince them that this isn't a worthless medium. It's a good educational medium, a good entertainment medium, it's a good medium for the expression of ideas.

Comics Reviews

Heaven or Hell? review by Dean Mullaney

The Swords of Heaven, the Flowers of Hell by Michael Moorcock and Howard Chaykin must be looked at from two perspectives: first, as a late addition to Moorcock's Eternal Champion cycle (21 novels plus this book), and second as the most recent alternative comic book. Both perspectives are interrelated and this particular book is a noble effort but an unfortunate disappointment.

The book was plotted by Moorcock, and designed, illustrated and scripted by Chaykin. Moorcock's plot is as interesting as many of the earlier Eternal Champion novels, while Chaykin's illustrative style and instinctual use of color are in top form. Yet, the structure of the story lacks the strengths of Moorcock's previous narratives, and the artwork, while superlative illustration, in many respects works against the story's impact.

The Eternal Champion, for those unfamiliar with the series, exists in many incarnations, in many times and planes of reality. Whether as Corum, Elric, Hawkmoon, Erekose, etc., the Eternal Champion, whether he knows it or not, fights for and to maintain the Cosmic Balance.

Lord Clen of *The Swords of Heaven* is the latest incarnation of the Champion. He is thrust into a world where regions named Heaven and Hell are at war and the inhabitants of the Dream Marshes, with whom Clen sides, are caught between the two sides. The concept is a trademark of the Eternal Champion cycle, whether the opposing forces be Heaven and Hell, Order and Chaos or variations thereupon.

A new Moorcock world as depicted by Howard Chaykin is exciting to see. However, if we assume a series progresses as each new installment is written, *The Swords of Heaven* halts that progression. In the concluding novel in the interlocking series, *A Quest for Tanelorn*, Moorcock brought many of the various incarnations together and offered a dramatic and intellectual cosmic denouement to both the Champions' fates and the Cosmic Balance itself. *The Swords of Heaven*, whether it takes place before or after *Tanelorn*, is not a worthy continuation of the series. It offers no new insights into the nature of the Champion or the Balance, as should be expected from such an after-the-fact continuation of the series.

One of the strong points of the cycle is the development of the Champion himself, how he analyzes the world into which he is thrown, how he rationalizes which course of action to take, and how his actions affect both himself and the Cosmic Balance. I found little of this in *The Swords of Heaven*. The Champion" is thrown into this world, meets the characters in the drama, is informed of the situation and acts immediately. There is little progression in the Champion's mind. We also do not learn enough about the people of the Dream Marshes to want them to be helped, and the supporting characters are barely explored at all. When Onara dies near the end, we are not familiar enough with her to feel deep sorrow. Perhaps the only momentous event of the story comes at the conclusion when Clen sails off to Tanelorn, yet the experiences he goes though in the story do not sufficiently build to this ending. Tanelorn is not clearly explained as the escape, the "peace" that Champion seeks.

Also, the references to the entire cycle are confusing. When Moorcock began tying together the various series he at first planted an air of mystery to intrigue the new reader, yet by the time each individual book was over, the new reader was aware of the basic structure of Moorcock's

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cosmology. In *The Swords of Heaven*, references to Corum, Elric, Hawkmoon, Ermizhad and even the Conjuction of the Million Spheres are thrown about yet never explained. Without an explanation here, I doubt if the reader unfamiliar with the series would even know what the Conjuction of the Million Spheres is! The Black Sword, crucial to the cycle, is depicted as merely a figuratively hungry sword. Discussions with others unfamiliar with the series confirms that confusion exists. As Moorcock has himself said, each book stands on its own for readers new to the series, but the more familiar readers can get something extra from the stories. In the past, Moorcock's references to other characters and events did not detract from the new reader's understanding. In this story, when Captain Bakthi recognizes Clen as the new manifestation of the Champion, he says to Clen, "But could you...please control your changes?" To which Clen replies, "Of course, Captain. I understand." Perhaps Clen understands, but does the reader unfamiliar with the Eternal Champion cycle?

The major problem with the book appears to be its length, or more precisely, lack of it. While the majority of the Eternal Champion novels are not overlong, Moorcock's rich use of description makes them read as though they were twice the actual length. Like Asimov, or Roy Thomas at his best, Moorcock can relate much in only a few words. This unfortunately is not the case in this book, and it is especially distressing in a comic book format where the script is so important and every word counts.

Howard Chaykin is one of the finest illustrators in the field. His use of color and opaquing is excellent, and he uses both to great effect in this book. I also enjoyed his use of white space, which is more liberal than in his previous painted efforts. I personally would have prefered more use of white paint highlights in some of the darker color schemes, but overall imagery of the artwork is laudable. Especially effective is his interpretation of Moorcock's own imagery. Moorcock's narrative descriptions of cities, beasts, and the angels in this story are perhaps without equal in the fantasy field, and Chaykin has captured these extremely complex notions expertly. I think it fair to say that Chaykin is the first artist to capture fully Moorcock's descriptive passages.

However, I do not find Chaykin to be an exceptional storyteller. Chaykin's predominant use of montages and large panels can be seen as an attempt to fit as much story as possible into the 64 page length. It may also be a rebellion against the structural restrictions of the Byron Preiss books. However, I think it works against him in this particular story. Since most of the scenes are shown in large panoramas, Chaykin discards one of the fundamental elements of comics storytelling: varying panel sizes to accent specific actions. For example, when Clen is clutched by Fevror's beast, the panel is the same size as the following panel showing a less dramatic scene. Or, when Fevror kills the woman who rescued Clen, the panel is small and has little impact. And yet Chaykin can be a masterful storyteller, as in the end of the book where he opens up to show Clen witnessing the arrival of the ship. The battle scenes, on the other hand, are not given a different tempo from the more sedate scenes, and the result is somewhat boring.

The concept of a new Eternal Champion story is exciting to anyone familiar with the series, yet I would have hoped for a story with grander aspirations. The prospect of giving Howard Chaykin a solid story to work with its equally exciting, yet I would have hoped for more dynamic storytelling. Clen's physical likeness to a young Burt Lancaster seems more than superficial. In fact, Clen appears more like the daring and flippant Burt Lancaster of *The Crimson Pirate* days than an incarnation of the hero of one of fantasy's greatest series, the Eternal Champion. ●

Gen of Hiroshima review by cat yronwode

Recently an increasing number of cartoonists, both over and underground, have been exploring a theme new to the comics medium — autobiography. Undoubtedly this small but admirable "new wave" originated in the underground. Robert Crumb, using a fictionalized form of himself as a protagonist all the way back in Zap no. 1, at first drew upon the venerable cliche of humour strips, "the tribulations of the cartoonist," a bit of self-indulgence utilized by everyone from Will Eisner to Gus Arriola, whereby the strip's creator appears in a funny light in his own creation. This soon developed into more realistic autobiography, as the reader watched Crumb's romantic problems, his love of old music and his disaffection with American society for pages on end. Other undergrounders began to use the autobiographical form: Sharon Rudahl, Harvey Pekar, Aline Kominsky, Trina Robbins, and most adeptly of all, Art Spiegelman.

Spiegelman (and Rudahl, to a lesser extent) soon went beyond tales of their own lives and began to present semi-fictionalized stories based on the experiences of their parents and grandparents. From there it was but a short step to approaching the kind of universality which has always characterized "literature" and kept it aloof from "popular fiction" Will Eisner, who had long ago toyed with the humorous "tribulations of the cartoonist" theme, produced a monumental autobiographical work called, *A Contract with God* which he chose to describe as "eyewitness fiction." It seems that the autobiographical form has found a small, but hopefully growing, audience in fandom.

Which brings me to the work at hand, an amazing comic written by a man who lived through amazing and horrifying times. The book is *Gen of Hiroshima* and the cartoonist is Keiji Nakazawa, a survivor of the atomic bomb attack which destroyed his home and killed much of his fam-

ily. *Gen* (the "G" in Gen is pronounced hard, as in give) is a monumental work. It is still in progress, having been started in the late 1960s in Japan. The story at this point is over 1,100 pages long. It is also popular: the circulation of the series is about five million, it has been collected into a set of albums and a two-part movie has been made from it. Only American cultural isolation has kept *Gen* from being known here—that and perhaps American guilt and apathy for the atrocities committed upon the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

A group of anti-war activists based in Japan have undertaken to provide translations of the book into various languages. This group is called Project Gen. Their translation, published by the War Resisters League, forms the basis for a new and greatly improved edition which has just been published by Leonard Rifas' Educomics. Rifas intends to bring out the whole work in the form of 48 page "underground" format comics, that is, black and white with color covers. He has put a lot of work into preparing the art for American use, specifically in the matter of redrawing the word balloons to accomodate the change from Japanese's vertical format to English's horizontal one. He has lettered the book also and added some very pleasing zipatone effects, to give it a more three dimensional (and hence more "American" look.) In addition, Pete Poplaski, one of the most underrated and inspired "swipe artists" I know (his Chester Gould sendup on the cover of *Corporate Crime* no. 2 is a great little parody-homage to *Dick Tracy*) has drawn a cover for this edition. Borrowing heavily from Nakazawa's style, he still manages, by his use of color and composition, to create an intensely dramatic scene, the kind American readers are used to, in place of Nakazawa's own deceptively humorous first volume cover.

It is obvious from the above that the "Americanization" of *Gen* implies that the comic is so different in either artistic or literary style that many American comic book fans may find it doesn't fall into their definitions of what comics are. This will be so especially with those fans who insist that "comics are fun" and "comics are light escape fiction." *Gen* is neither. Furthermore, and this is where my own sensibilities took the biggest leap of faith, the artistic standards in Japanese comics are simply . . . well, *alien* . . . to what we are used to over here. The renditions of people are uncompromisingly cartooney, even in the most tragic stituations, while the landscapes and architecture are portrayed with considerably more realism. The effect is a bit jarring in the same way that Jack Cole's or Will Eisner's work can be jarring to readers who expect "drama" to be synonymous with clench-mouthed muscle-popping masculinity.

Nakazawa's work is even farther afield of the heroic mainstream than Cole's or

Eisner's, however. His use of what I take to be typical Japanese cliches of body positioning are like nothing ever seen in any American comic book. For instance, when a person is hit on the head and the overtones are supposed to be slightly funny, their legs fly up into the air like a ballet dancer's. When people joke, they often cross their eyes. When they cry, two huge semi-solid looking tears fly out of the corners of their eyes. These idiosyncracies may be unfamiliar, but in the end they are no stranger than some typical American visual conventions. In American comics, for instance women have noses which are only visible in profile as tiny upturned triangles but when seen in frontal views become merely two dots. Likewise, while American women have two lips, men have only a lower one. It's all a matter of cultural imagery in the end. What is important is how well the comic works in terms of conveying a story, for comics are not a simple mixture of words and isolated pictures; they are an alloy of literature and illustration. And like any alloy, they must, to be valuable, contain "emergent qualities," factors not found in an examination of their separate component parts.

By this standard, *Gen* is a remarkable comic, one which succeeds and is itself deserving of success. The plot, if autobiographical fiction can be said to have a plot, is deceptively simple. When I was told about the book, I was eager to read it. Curiosity compounded with voyeuristic horror had me tense and sweaty by the time the air raid sirens sounded on page four. This was it; Gen's mother was shouting, "Gen, you fool! *Hurry!* Get into the bomb shelter!" Gen dawdled. It was like the scene in the opening of *The Wizard of Oz* where Judy Garland is too late to make it into the cellar. Real heart-stopping stuff.

A false alarm. The American planes fly away. Nobody is hurt. Back to school. Back to work

Instead of the Bomb-with-a-capital-B the story takes up the growing anti-war and anti-government leanings of Gen's father. His rebellion takes the form of farting and acting insolent while at a compulsory militia drill, but the humor is only a cover for his attempts to show his neighbors that the war has become suicidal. They are practicing with sharpened bamboo sticks. The enemy has machine guns. And, closest to heart, his family is starving on a diet of potatoes.

On page twenty there's another air raid alert. This time, instead of Gen's dawdling, the tension is increased by his father's hopeless anger. "If we get bombed, we get killed even if we hide in the shelter. I'm *tired* of running around." But it's a false alarm. No planes come.

By this time I was becomming aware of a factor in my own personality which was hitherto unknown to me. It was a disquieting revelation. I *wanted* the bomb to drop. I wanted to have an end to this tension so that the "story" could go on! It was disturbing to realize that my expectations had been so programmed that I look forward to scenes of violence and destruction in comics. The "obligatory fight scene" has become an internalized cliche. I had to think hard about that.

Nakazawa uses a very graceful device to show the passage of time. He gives whole panels over to drawings of the sun. These are not the usual rising and setting sun scenes used by animators to depict the beginning and close of a day; they are much subtler than that. For one thing, the sun doesn't solely appear as a marker of time, a cosmic metronome. There are many panels in which it simply floats in the sky above the buildings and fields, while actions transpire below. The effect of this repetition is to create a feeling of pause, an effect reinforced by the fact that the sun is almost always seen as if through a light haze and in panels which are very narrow, either horizontally or vertically. I am one of those readers who

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THE SILVER AGE OF DC

by Rich Morrissey

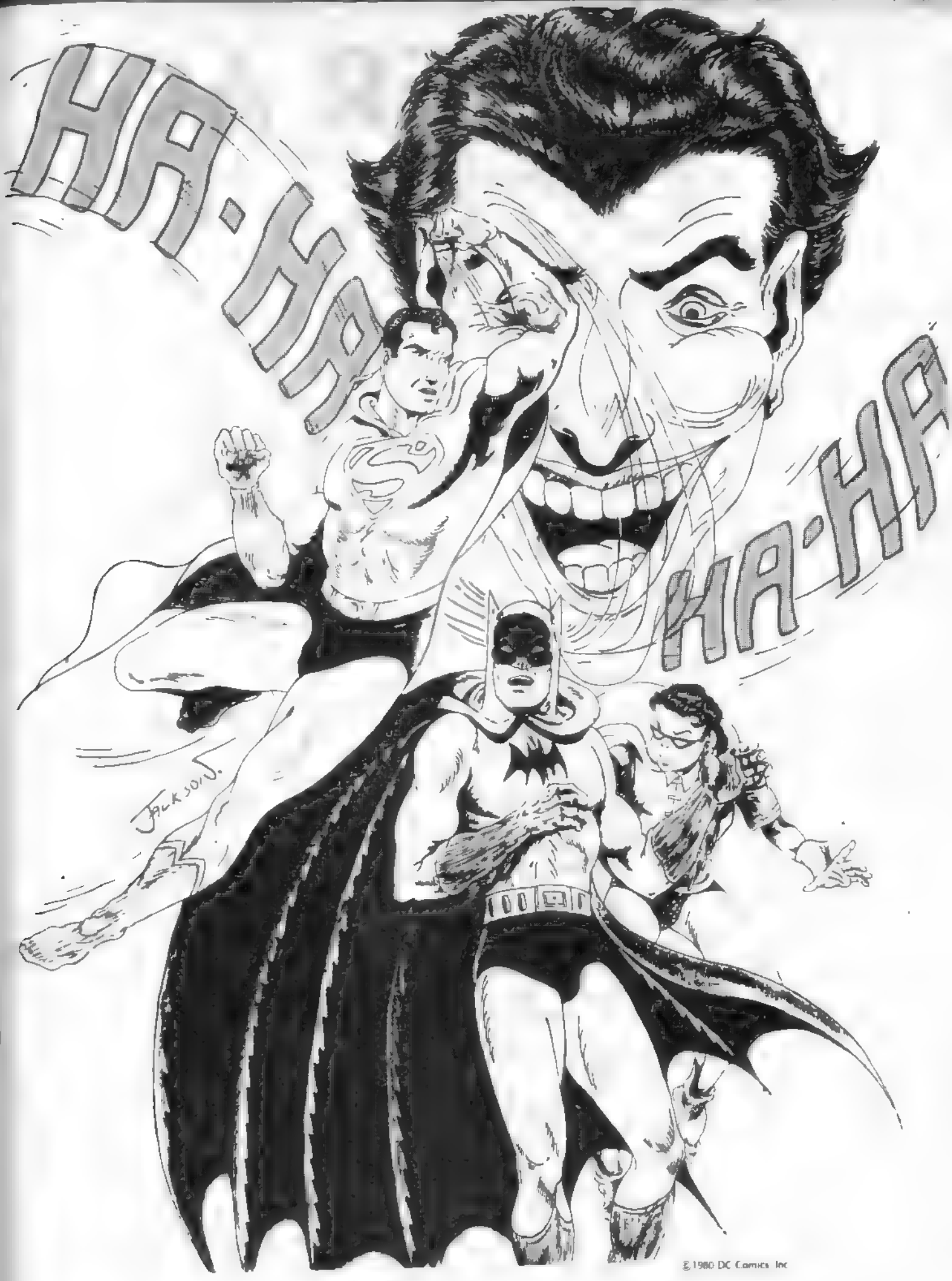
The Silver Age of comics, which began for all intents and purposes in 1956 and the appearance of the Flash in Showcase #4, represents the roots of modern day comics. Comics Feature has commissioned many of the most knowledgeable comic book critics to chronicle this period of comics history which continued until the late 1960s when we entered the modern age of comics.

This series will continue in Comics Feature for at least the next six or seven issues. The first installment, the first half of which appears in this issue, covers the years 1956 through November 1961. In addituon to the major ongoing chronological article, there will be sidebars dealing with specific titles which were influential or representative of the period. By the time the entire series is completed, we will have covered in retrospect comics as they were in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Showcase #4, September-October 1956, has often been cited as the beginning of the "Silver Age of Comics." It's only in retrospect that its importance can be realized, because at the time there wasn't anything particularly remarkable about it. Although the seemingly-immortal Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman (together with a few lesser heroes like Green Arrow who backed up these characters in anthology titles) were the only superheroes still regularly published by DC, the industry as a whole had by no means forgotten the genre that had originally made comic books viable in their own right. Every so often one company or another would attempt to revive some of the heroes that had once proved so successful, or to introduce new ones. Timely/Atlas brought back the Human Torch, the Sub-Mariner and Captain America briefly in the mid-1950s, and Charlton made a similar experiment with the old Fox hero, the Blue Beetle. Quality's *Plastic Man* was still running, although his days were numbered—and various short-lived heroes like Timely's Venus and DC's Captain Comet also bobbed up and down. No, superheroes were by no means dead in 1956, and even the revival of the Flash, in an experimental title that featured completely different characters every issue, could hardly have been considered at the time to be any more successful than the average.

No, what distinguished this Flash revival from those of the Sub-Mariner and others was that it wasn't entirely a revival, but a deliberate attempt to make a new start. The idea of reviving the old hero of the 1940s was one of many that were suggested at editorial meetings, but, since superheroes were such an uncertain proposition at the time, it was assigned to a single issue of *Showcase* rather than starting off in its own book as did better-received ideas. The *Flash* issue was assigned to Julius Schwartz, the same editor who'd handled the old series, but he decided to approach it in a different way. Rather than revive the original character, one designed in the early 1940s, and rather dated in some ways, and try to pile more stories onto the same framework, Schwartz chose to build a completely new foundation: not the same Flash at all, but a new character by the same name! He had the same attractive power of the first Flash, superspeed, but he had a new costume, a new secret identity, a new origin (as told in that first issue) and new supporting characters and villains. The stories were by three of the same people who'd handled the first Flash toward the end of his career: writers Bob Kanigher and John Broome and artist Carmine Infantino (with inks by another old Schwartz-stable artist, Joe Kubert), but now they had more freedom to develop an original character in their own way, rather than being limited to the format and style Gardner Fox and Harry Lampert had developed in 1940. The only connection between this new Flash and the old one was a panel in the first story, in which Barry Allen, the new Flash, was shown reading a comic book about the original Flash, Jay Garrick, and deciding to take the same name for his own crime-fighting identity.

This panel symbolically, and afterwards literally, embodied a major part of this new Flash's appeal: as far as the story was concerned, he was *real*, and the earlier Flash was mere fiction. Later, of course, it was to be revealed that the two Flashes actually *did* live on parallel Earths, and that other characters later added to the DC lineup lived in still other dimensions. Many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JACKSON
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fans have decried the numerous Earths that now play such an important part in the DC mythos, and with some justice: they *can* be confusing from time to time. The first Flash's Earth has now been designated "Earth-Two," and the second Flash's "Earth-One" —although, as Schwartz later noted, perhaps the names should have properly been reversed. Looking back from 1980, when Earth-One and its universe have become far more complex and extensive than Earth-2 ever was, I can easily agree; in fact, some people in the business have seriously suggested that the time is ripe for DC to introduce a third mainstream Earth in order to eliminate much of the stultifying continuity of Earth-One.

But in 1956, although it was not to be specifically named for several years, "Earth-One" was a very appropriate name for the world of the Flash, the first really imaginative superhero conceived for the 1950s rather than the 1930s or 1940s. Even with the declining page count, publishers had long been reluctant to allow fewer than three stories in a comic book, reducing most stories to eight pages or fewer. But *Showcase* #4 contained only *two* stories of about twelve pages, thus allowing for more characterization and plot development than had been common for years. With all these innovations going for it, the *Flash* issue became the most successful of the first four *Showcase* issues, and when the sales figures came in, the character was tested again in *Showcase* #8. It soon became clear that, unlike most of the attempted revivals of 1940s heroes, the new version of the Flash did have lasting appeal. After two more *Showcase* appearances, he was given his own magazine (beginning with #105, where the *Flash Comics* of the 1940s had left off) which has lasted to this day.

Oddly enough, the first editor who followed up on the new trends pioneered in the Flash *Showcases* wasn't Schwartz himself, but Mort Weisinger, the editor of most of the Superman titles. Like all the editors at DC, Weisinger was only now beginning to see his name in the indiciae: ever since Sheldon Mayer's retirement in 1948, all DC titles had hitherto listed Whitney Ellsworth as editor. In actual fact, Ellsworth had been only an editorial director (comparable to Joe Orlando today), and Weisinger had edited all the books featuring Superman or Superboy for many years. Even so, he may well have had more freedom after Ellsworth retired and all DC editors assusmed sole responsibility for their titles, but I suspect that it was the success of the *Flash* experiment that convinced him that he had the right idea as to which direction his titles should take. It was right after the Schwartz demonstration that a superhero was still a viable concept that the Weisinger books underwent a strong change in emphasis from a diverse collection of "anthology" titles that happened to have the same character as a lead feature, to a coherent "family" of comic books taking place in a distinct universe.

As early as 1954 Weisinger had convinced the executives at DC to give *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* his own book, but this was carried through largely because Jack Larson's character had been so popular on the then-current *Superman* TV series. Lois Lane, on the other hand, had been around since Superman's first story and had only a brief stint at solo action in a series of four-page fillers in *Superman* in the mid-1940s, but now, Weisinger felt, the time was ripe to see how she'd do in her own book. The two *Showcase* issues after the second *Flash* tryout were devoted to *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane*, and they too did well enough to result in a permanent addition to the line.

Weisinger also began to do the same thing with his long-running heroes that Schwartz had done with the Flash: reexamining their legends and supporting characters, and bringing them more up-to-date. As he was working with pre-existing characters, he didn't have the freedom to pick and choose that Schwartz did, but he did give both Green Arrow and Aquaman new origins, totally different from the previously established ones that (especially in Aquaman's case) paved the way for new story ideas and supporting characters. Superman's origin was too much a part of American legend to change greatly, but even that was slightly embellished and clarified to be more acceptable to the post-Sputnik generation. Added were such elements as the significance of Krypton's red sun and Earth's yellow one in giving Superman his powers. Individual events, like Clark Kent's first scoop for the *Daily Planet*, often were completely changed. Many new concepts, like the Phantom Zone and the bottle-city of Kandor, became permanent parts of the legend.

It's become fashionable in many fannish circles to put down these additions to the Superman legend, and it must be admitted that some of them, such as the Bizarros and the rainbow-colored varieties of kryptonite, *were* somewhat overdone. But it must be remembered that the 1950s were a time of experimentation and *all* editors, once the basic idea of redeveloping a character was conceived, were eager to try not only ideas that had worked before, but ideas they felt *might* work. Sidekicks of various sorts had been very popular in the Golden Age, and it didn't take long for them to reappear. Even the Flash, the only really new hero of the decade, was saddled with both of the major classes of 1940s sidekicks. The original Flash had had three idiot-savant friends named Winky, Blinky and Noddy, whose doppelgangers turned up in the first new Flash story written by Gardner Fox, but the reaction, except from a few nostalgic older fans like Roy Thomas, was not at all favorable, and they returned to oblivion.

Teenage sidekicks, on the other hand, enjoyed a brief flurry of resurgence at DC in the late 1950s. Unlike his predecessor, the new Flash had one of those, too, Kid Flash, and even the long-running solo stars, Aquaman and Superman, received teenage partners at last. Aquaman's Aqualad became a regular in most of the stories, but it was Superman's Supergirl, perhaps inspired more by Fawcett's Mary Marvel than by the old kid sidekicks, who set the trend Kid Flash followed. Both soon developed into solo stars, appearing in their own features (Supergirl's in the back of *Action Comics*, Kid Flash's sporadically in the back of *Flash*) far more often than with their adult mentors.

Indeed, the creation of Supergirl was indicative of the logical extension of the Superman legend's expansion. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the new supporting characters became so pervasive that they began to replace the old backup features with strips of their own. By the early 1960s, the Weisinger titles had truly become the "Superman Family"; every single feature, both front and back (and, in keeping with Schwartz's innovation, his anthology titles like *Action* and *Adventure* now had only two features in each issue, rather than three) dealt with Superman or one or more of his friends. This too has been decried by many fans, yet it must be remembered that many of the old backups, like *Tommy Tomorrow*, had outlived their

Flash

by Murray R. Ward

When DC editor Julius Schwartz used his berth in *Showcase* #4 in 1956 to introduce the modern-day counterpart to the Golden Age Flash, he took the first step in rebuilding a line of comics which, over a decade before had been both an integral part and a serious rival of the DC line of the time: the All-American line. The original Flash, Green Lantern and their comrades in the Justice Society of America of the 1940s started out as the newest additions to the pantheon of heroes who followed in the wake of DC's superstars, Superman and Batman. Eventually, they became a separate entity within the DC group, even splitting off for a time from the main line and forming their own company, after a fashion. What Schwartz started with the new Flash in 1956, he would continue with Green Lantern, the Justice League and others, until he had virtually recreated the entire All-American groups of characters, although in altered guise.

The Flash's appearance in *Showcase* presented several "firsts" which would later serve as the master mold for future Julie Schwartz-edited heroes, and for the superheroes of the 1960s in general. Schwartz, with writers Robert Kanigher (who wrote the origin and one story in each of the four *Showcase* tryouts, then left the strip) and John Broome (Flash's and Green Lantern's "godfather," who created the greater part of the familiar mythos of both these heroes), gave us a superhero who was an ordinary guy in his secret identity, and who lucked into his amazing powers through accidental means. Unlike Superman, the predestined hero, or Batman, driven to become a crusader for justice, Barry Allen stumbled into the gift of superspeed and was inspired to use it to fight crime by both his profession as a police scientist and by, of all things, his interest in old comic books, particularly those featuring Jay Garrick, the original Flash, whose name he adopted for his alter ego. Also unlike the two major DC characters, Superman and Batman, Flash posessed neither a multiplicity of overwhelming powers nor a series of skills developed through lifelong training. He had one power, speed, plus a few attendant abilities such as his friction-resistant body-aura and mental control of his molecular structure. For the first time since the Golden Age, the element of suspense was back in comics featuring a costumed crime-fighter: we did not know whether Flash would prove immune to the villain's weapons or escape the death-trap. The villains themselves were as colorful as Flash, although they tended to depend on a series of scientific gadgets rather than natural powers like Flash's own. This was a refreshing change from Superman's stories wherein everyone seemed to gain temporary Kryptonian powers sooner or later. The Flash's "Rogues Gallery" included some of the quintessential villains of the Silver Age: the Pied Piper, Trickster, the Mirror Master, et al.

The art on the strip was by Carmine Infantino, usually inked by Joe Giella, and was an important reason for the strip's success. Infantino's inimitable depiction of Flash in super-speed action made Flash's special world believable. His figure was lithe, and finely rendered, in a style which, given today's overly-muscular heroes, makes Flash look "different." Yet even today, Infantino's Flash is the definitive version of the character.

The Flash's main literary and thematic antecedents, aside from the obvious debt to his earlier counterpart, were the conventions of space opera-style science fiction which Schwartz and Broome ladled into the stories at every opportunity, and the original Fawcett Captain Marvel. Like Billy Batson, Barry Allen is a naive gosh-wow innocent, eyes aglow with childish sense of wonder, who is gifted with amazing powers by a bolt of lightning. And also like the old Shazam's successor, Flash finds himself in a world where the impossible happens on a daily basis and the patently ridiculous is presented with a straight face. For Captain Marvel, it was old Shazam's magic and C.C. Beck's cartoon stylings that let us accept his absurd milieu; for Flash, the unbelievable became the everyday thanks to the pseudo-scientific explanations of Broome (and later Gardner Fox) and the realistic art of Infantino.

And we believed. We believed in a hero who could run faster than light, yet could not keep a date with his girlfriend on time, and could be put out of action by a hurled boomerang which must have seemed to him to be standing still. And because we believed in the unbelievable, because our own sense of wonder and sense of fun was titillated, the Flash became the forerunner of a string of superheroes whose popularity was destined to far outlast that of their Golden Age namesakes.

time. If the new policy resulted in such absurdities as a regular Bizarro World series, it also introduced some features with real potential and quality, notably the *Legion of Super-Heroes*, still popular and successful even after its complete divorce from the *Superboy* strip in which the characters originated.

At this time, the spirit of innovation, at least in regard to superheroes, was largely limited to the Schwartz and Weisinger offices. Jack Schiff handled the various Batman books including *World's Finest*, whose lead feature had been a joint adventure of Batman and Superman since 1954. He too tried to innovate, but most of his ideas were

Adam Strange

by Murray R. Ward

The second Schwartz-edited strip to appear in *Showcase* was a new and totally untried hero Adam Strange, in issue #17.

Adam Strange's only possible Golden Age predecessor was a hero called Gary Concord, the Ultra Man, who preceded Green Lantern as the star of *All American Comics*. To quote from the opening of his story in *All Star* #1: "It is the year 2240 A.D. As High Moderator of the United States of North America, it is the duty of Gary Concord, Ultra-Man, to preserve the peace of the nation—and he means to have peace even if he has to fight to get it!" Adam Strange, who sported a red uniform and similar helmet and cross-pieces over his chest as Concord's, was also a futuristic hero. But his world was not the Earth of the future, but the present-day planet Rann in Alpha Centauri's solar system.

Again the series began with a fortuitous accident: this time, instead of a lightning bolt as in the case of Flash, the mysterious zeta-beam struck from the sky and teleported young archaeologist Adam Strange to what was to become his adopted homeworld. Thrust into a strange new world Adam Strange's powers were his keen wits, his gallery of villains were the aliens and natural disasters which threatened Rann, and his "gimmick" was the zeta-beam, which transported him erratically to and from Earth in each adventure. Like Flash, Adam Strange became a hero not through destiny or preparation, but by having the opportunity thrust upon him. He continued to be a hero teleporting to Rann at every opportunity, not primarily to battle evil and injustice, but to see his girlfriend, Alanna of Ranagar. (Like Barry Allen, Adam Strange had trouble keeping dates!)

Julius Schwartz again filled the hero's world with the trappings of his beloved science fiction, this time with the aid of veteran scriptwriter Gardner Fox. If Fox's scripts tended to become predictable, what with Strange being shifted to Rann, encountering and battling a menace, and disappearing back to Earth in every story, this was more than made up for by the variety of bizarre and yet strangely pseudo-scientifically plausible menaces which Fox had the hero face. Moreover, after three *Showcase* outings pencilled by Mike Sekowsky, the series, which headlined in *Mystery in Space* beginning in issue #53, was adorned with the stylized pencilling of *Flash* artist Carmine Infantino, most often inked by Murphy Anderson. Infantino's angular style and inventive surroundings and Anderson's slick inking contributed to the series' effectiveness. In fact, the series would eventually be cancelled at least partly due to Infantino's departure to take over the artwork of Batman in *Detective* in 1964. In the early days of the Silver Age, Adam Strange was a champion second only to the Flash in the eyes of the fans.

clearly traceable to Mort Weisinger, whose *Aquaman* and *Green Arrow* strips he'd taken over. The *Batman* strip was invaded by Batwoman, Bat-Girl, Bat-Mite, and even Bat-Hound, and took on an inappropriate science fiction slant. It still had some good writing by long-time scripter Bill Finger, but what changes there were were definitely for the worse. J'onn J'onzz, originally conceived for a *Detective* backup feature about a detective who was a disguised Martian and operated secretly, became a straight superhero strip, but the Martian Manhunter, like all too many of Mort Weisinger's supporting characters with superpowers, turned into little more than an odd-looking Superman. Even worse was *Wonder Woman*, which had been on a downhill trend since the death in 1948 of its creator and original writer, William Marston. It had been reassigned to Bob Kanigher, then a rising young writer at DC, but well over a decade of writing a complex character he never fully understood had led to a plunge into repetitious mediocrity. *Wonder Woman* and various Batman titles were eventually revitalized, but not until they were given to other editors later in the decade.

Even Schwartz, who'd started it all, was only gradually beginning to concentrate on superheroes. Since the collapse of the Golden Age heroes, he'd been best known for very diverse assignments, ranging from westerns to experimental titles like *Danger Trail*, and especially for the science fiction titles, *Mystery in Space* and *Strange Adventures*. These two titles were devoted primarily to non-series stories; they did contain a few series characters who might be considered superheroes, like Adam Strange, but they generally weren't thought of that way.

However, the success of *Flash* naturally gave rise to thoughts of reviving other characters who'd been popular in the Golden Age. The Flash had been one of two characters who'd had their own books at one time but had lost them in the late 1940s, and the other, Green Lantern, had been even more popular than the Flash toward the end. So the next Schwartz revival was a new version of Green Lantern, in *Showcase* #22, in which the original concept of Martin Nodell and Bill Finger was reworked by writer John Broome and artist Gil Kane.

End Part One •

Fandom Almanac

Conventions

If you are running a convention, or know of one in your area, and would like to be listed in this space, please send all pertinent information to COMICS FEATURE

May 4. LONG ISLAND MONTHLY COMIC BOOK & BASEBALL CARD SHOW. Coliseum Motor Inn, 1650 Hempstead Tpke, East Meadow, NY Hours: 10 - 5. Admission: Free

May 4. PHIL SEULING'S COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE. Hotel Taft, 7th Ave. & 50th Street, New York. Hours: 10 - 5 Admission: Free.

May 4. THE SUNDAY SHOW NORTH. Lyndhurst Holiday Inn, NJ. Rt. 17 and Rt 3, or N.J. Turnpike, Exit 16. Hours: 10 - 4 Admission: $1.00

May 23 - 25. ATLANTA COMIC—CON '80. Ramada Inn, Monroe Dr at I-85, Atlanta Guests: Terry Austin, Mike Grell, George Perez, Paul Gulacy, Bill Sienkiewicz. Admission: $5.00 before May 1st, $7.50 after. Contact: Harvey Sharpe, 1992 McJenkin Dr., Atlanta, GA 30345

Jun. 1. CHICAGO MINI-CON. Pick-Congress Hotel, 520 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Opens: 11:00 am. Admission 75¢

Jun. 14 - 15. THE GREAT MOTION PICTURE & TELEVISION, COMICS & SCIENCE FICTION FAIR. Glendale Civic Auditorium, 1401 N. Verdugo Rd., Glendale, CA. Hours: 6/14: 12-9; 6/15: 11-5 Admission: $3.75. Contact: Alex Klein, 1252 Sepulueda, Van Nuys, CA 91405

Jun. 19 - 21. HOUSTON FANTASY FESTIVAL. Shamrock Hilton, Houston. Guests: Chris Claremont, John Byrne, George Perez, Frank Brunner, Alex Toth, Harrison Ellenshaw. Admission: $12.00. Contact Houston Fantasy Festival, P.O Box 12613, Houston, TX 77087

Jun. 29. RELAX-A-CON COMIC BOOK AND COLLECTORS SHOW. York Township Hall, 1502 Meyers Rd., Lombard, IL Admission: $1.00. Contact: B.J.'s Comic Corner, 260 N. Ardmore Ave, Villa Park, IL 60181

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Comics Clubs

If you belong to a comics club and would like to be listed in this space, please send all pertinent information to COMICS FEATURE

Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, N.J. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P. O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Don Codpman, 131 Monterey Drive, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2Y 7A9.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Neil Cohen, 3824 N. 15th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 227-8701.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eide's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X 1A8

Fandom Press Clippings

If you'd like us to review your fanzine, please send two copies to our editorial address. Reviewers this issue are Billy Lightcap and Jay Zilber

WHIZZARD #13

Published irregularly. $2.00 per issue or $4/2 from Marty Klug, 5730 Chatport Road, Saint Louis MO 63129. 8½" x 11", 48 pages, offset on white paper, wraparound cover on tan card stock.

That *Whizzard* has only a modest circulation is, I think, just short of a minor tragedy. Simply put, this is one of the best comics fanzines around for the money and deserves a wider following than it presently has. It's sincere, homey, well-produced, and it's a never-ending source of depression to me that most people in my fannish circle have never heard of it.

Whizzard is primarily an interview-oriented fanzine; this issue spotlights five revealing discussions with Marshall Rogers, Craig Russell, Steve Gerber, Don McGregor, and Tim Conrad. (The artists's interviews are accompanied by exhaustive indexes of their comics and alternative press credits.) Though encompassing a variety of related and unrelated topics, each one generally focuses on its subject's most recent, best-known work: Rogers discusses his work on Batman and *Detectives, Inc.*; Russell and McGregor (separately) agonize over Marvel's mucking-up of *Killraven*; Gerber does a similar number on Howard the Duck, and contrasts the character with his forthcoming Stewart the Rat. Admittedly, each of these interviews seems to open with the same standard questions about training, background, and influences, ending with similarly standard questions about future plans, and there are a small number of pointless exchanges which easily could have been deleted from the published transcript to no harmful effect. Still, readers should be aware that these interviews are conducted by comics fans and college students, not professional journalists. Learning what to ask and what not to ask is part of the whole fanzine experience, and I have very few qualms with the final results. Without resorting to overintellectualizing, sensational muckraking, or wholesale putdowns of the comics field-at-large, all five interviews take off on their own distinct tangents and stand as informative, enlightening and wholly worthwhile.

Partly to expand on the subjects raised in these interviews, *Whizzard* has extended its non-interview material in this issue. The prolific Rich Morrissey here examines *Detective Comics* during the Marshall Rogers period, providing a behind-the-scenes look at the circumstances which brought Rogers onto (and subsequently off of) the Batman feature in that title. Publisher Marty Klug looks into the high and low points of the Killraven saga in *Amazing Adventures*, and Kenn Thomas surveys Steve Ditko's recent work (perhaps in lieu of an interview with the elusive Mr. Ditko). Rounding out the issue is an imaginative and genuinely amusing fan strip by Bill Lewis, plus a handful of fillers, chatty letters, and fanzine reviews.

The only reason I can think of to account for *Whizzard*'s at-best-limited success is that it has not "gone slick." Don't let this dissuade you! The magazine is snappily illustrated by top fan talents, and with few exceptions layouts are clean and efficient. I would only suggest to Klug that he insist his printer take care to clean up some of the more obtrusive paste-up lines next time. Otherwise, *Whizzard* is fine, fine stuff, and deserves the same wide exposure as that enjoyed by the various semi-professional magazines currently dominating the fan press. A full-color cover don't make or break the innards, folks. Thou shalt not pass this one up! —J.Z.

RATZLAFFE FUNNIES #2

50¢ from Brouhaha Studio, 1718 Highland Avenue, Portsmouth, OH 45662. 8½" x 3", 28 pages on white paper, color covers on coated stock.

Ratzlaffe Funnies is a well printed strip-zine in the shape of a newspaper strip, and contains two stories by Tim Fuller. Fuller's

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cartooning style is very good and judging by the amount of work he's putting into stipzines lately, he's bound to get even better.

The writing, however, still needs some work. They are wild satires, but it appears that the full extent of Fuller's humor remains in his head and doesn't really transfer to the page. The first story, "The Werewolf of Gobblers Knob," is a 45-panel story about a radio personality named Wolfman Sam, who is patterned after a well-known ex-DJ of a similar name, who is presumed to have turned into an actual werewolf. The second story is "C.B. & the Boar" starring C.B. McCoy, "that lovable ol' redneck" whose life story has been turned into a TV show, and his trucking partner Ben Boar (who actually is a boar!).

Fuller's satire is squarely aimed at popular culture, and while his satire is somewhat simplistic, he has some obvious talent which is sure to develop as he keeps churning out more strips. For 50¢, *Ratzlaffe Funnies* can't hurt your wallet and you'll get the chance to see an upcoming cartoonist in action. -B.L.

HOO HA COMICS AND STORIES #2

$1.75 from Brouhaha Studio, 1718 Highland Avenue, Portsmouth, OH 45662. 8½" x 10¾", 28 pages, offset on white paper, color covers on coated stock.

Hoo ha is produced by the same people who do *Ratzlaffe Funnies*, and this stripzine reads much better. The large size allows for a more open layout, and the strips by John Leisure and Tim Fuller are particularly fun to read.

There are two adventures of Death-Wyler, the Last Rabbit on Earth. It seems that automatons run the world and use robots disguised as animals to hunt down and kill the "blood animals." The "funny animal" genre is very well handled by Fuller's cartoon style, and Leisure adds some genuinely funny bits in the dialogue. In a second Death-Wyler story we learn more of the scenario, and how Dr. Geppetto, a human, before his death began reprogramming some of the robots to work against the evil General Bing. It's all very funny stuff, and is a continuing adventure.

"Smilin' Marv" of "Marvin Comics" presents "The World of Doric Dogstar," an inventive Conan parody, only with a dog as the barbarian hero. Arriving in a city and looking for the local pub, Dogstar asks, "Where the Golden Hydrant?" and uses such exclamations as "By Crumb!" The later appearance of a checkered cab in this same story brings the absurdity full circle.

Also included is "An Orian Odyssey" about Shep Urban, the Everyman, and his partner going to the planet Orian to foil an attempted invasion of Earth. But the story doesn't really succeed as parody, despite some clever dialogue. Leisure also offers a short prose story about "Nightshade the Avenger."

The first three stories in *Hoo ha Comics and Stories* #2 are well worth buying this zine, even if the remainder of the issue is somewhat tedious.—B.L.

MINDROT #16

Published quarterly, $2.00 per issue or $6/4 issues from David Mruz, 3112 Holmes Avenue South, Minneapolis MN 55408. 5½" x 8½", 40 pages, offset on white paper, cover on red card stock.

Mindrot, the Animated Film Quarterly, is a pleasant and unpretentious little package which has arguably become the premier fanzine of the animation field. (Certainly it is the only one to maintain any sort of frequent, regular schedule.) For the uninitiated, recent past issues have featured, for instance, interviews with Bob Clampett and Jack Hannah, an overview of *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, extensive indexes of MGM and Columbia cartoons, a Walter Lantz salute, and in-depth reviews and coverage of the *Lord of the Rings* and *Watership Down* productions, to name but a few. Most of issue #16 is given to a complete filmography of *Mighty Mouse*, the popular Terrytoons feature. Dutifully researched and annotated by Will Timbes Friedwald, it's more about *Mighty Mouse* than anyone ever thought there was to know, including synopses of every episode, credits, and plenty of fascinating background and anecdotal material. Also in this issue is Jim Korkis's regular column, "Harlequin." Readers of *The Comics Journal* may already be familiar with his informative insights into the animation field; these columns here reflect Jim's less formal, personal side. Jerry Beck's "Cartoon Review" examines the latest crop of Saturday morning disasters (with a few surprising, positive notes). And finally there is the usual assortment of short features, editorials, ads, and chatty letters.

I sometimes wish editor Mruz would take a firmer editorial hand in organizing his contributors' material, and (though steadily improving) his production values are a bit uneven. Still, *Mindrot* is always a great deal of fun. It's an excellent introduction to animation fandom for the neophyte, and an indispensible newsletter and reference volume for the already-active cartoon buff. And it has a certain additional charm, in that *Mindrot* is neither a professional magazine nor does it aspire to become one. It is a remnant of that dying breed, the fanzine done purely for the sheer pleasure of exchanging information and opinions about a common interest. If for no other reason, I could not recommend it more enthusiastically.

Unfortunately, there *is* another reason. *Mindrot* is in a bit of financial trouble. While publishing costs are increasing, *Mindrot*'s subscription base is actually dwindling, thanks mostly to its publisher's overly-generous freebie policies of the past. With this issue the price has been raised to an unseemly $2.00, and free copies to fringe supporters have necessarily come to a halt. Not to lay on the hard-sell, but *do not hesitate* to send off for a sample copy or subscription if you've any serious or frivolous interest in the subject! —J.Z.

HE'P #5

Published irregularly. 50¢ from Chris Rock, PO Box 14, West Plains MO 65775. 5½" x 8½", 16 pages, offset on white paper, two color cover.

For what it's worth, the title *HE'P* is a contraction of Harvey Kurtzman's *Help* magazine. On the other hand, Chris Rock's infrequent mini-zine (formerly entitled *Art*, for what it's worth) is a collection of self-indulgent, sometimes amusing, sometimes incomprehensible strips, panels, gags, and doodles. To better put things in context, *HE'P* is one of a group of low-budget, small-scale underground publishers that include Bob Vojtko, George Erling, Brad Foster, Bob Polio, Bill Sherman and others. It's an increasingly popular format: these little collections, often produced in quick bursts of creativity and energy, are cheap to produce and fun to assemble. They keep the creative juices and critical feedback flowing, and otherwise they're perfectly harmless little exercises that may or may not be of interest outside this circle of cartoonists, their friends, and hangers-on. For the amounts of coin asked for these mini-zines, though, you've got to be purposely difficult in order to feel ripped off. At worst, one might tend to whiz through them too fast and be left wondering what it's all about. Personally, I think they make for a neat little four-minute diversion.

Except for the production work, Chris does relatively little material in this issue himself. *HE'P* #5 consists of a 4-page EC-style mystery story by Richard Green (with a Chris Rock caricature playing the host bit), and Cat Yronwode contributes a philosophical strip on "The Nature of Reality." Jamie Alder (alias Bill Shut) provides something called "Time Lapse Growth," a black-and-white version of a previously-circulated color xerox strip of sorts, neither of which bear much resemblence to the series of words and pictures that comprise what is commonly considered a comic strip. Old-timer Ron Foss does a 3-pager that is only slightly more comprehensible. Other artists represented,

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however briefly, are Denis McFarling and Larry Weir, and Chris Rock outlines—in illustrated text form—how to properly eat a Toffifay candy bar. And finally, if you beg, wheedle and cajole him sufficiently, you might get a dittoed letters supplement from Chris called *Mo' He'p*. For what it's worth.—J.Z.

THE EQUALIZER #1

75¢. 36 pages, 5½" x 8½" offset on white paper, color cover

This first issue, while crude in many respects, shows the work of a very promising talent named Kirk Kennedy. Unfortunately, there is no publishing or ordering information in the zine so I can't tell you how to pick up a copy. If you're reading this, Kirk, send us the info.

Kennedy has created a scenario, which while derivative in some respects, is inventive. It is a wonderful combination of space opera, "deep" meaning, and fun superhero antics. It seems that "one hundred and fifty million, billion years ago . . . there dwelt a civilization so far advanced they had not only the electric coffee pot but also space travel and galactic government." But, "the subject (at hand) is religion" and tells the story of the God and the Lost Founders. "The God . . . is the last surviving god to escape the destruction of the heaven . . . The Lost Founders . . . were the inhabitants of heaven who were roaming space when the heaven was destroyed."

The Equalizer, dressed in oddly superheroic garb, is "the balance between the forces of evil and the power of good." Yet his adventures are not heavy handed. While there are dramatic motivational elements to the Equalizer's story, his actions are at times very tongue-in-cheek. Kennedy has achieved a really fine balance between his various themes.

The scripting, however, is crude, with typos popping up more than they should. The artwork, too, is somewhat crude, but Kennedy's style is powerful nonetheless. He is a cartoonist in an action-oriented genre, but the work is effective, much in the same way Joe Staton's work on *E-Man* was effective. The only time Kennedy's work actually fails is one of the zine's stories in which he attempts to go for slickness. His strength is in his cartooney figures and facial expressions.

The printing in the zine is, unfortunately, uneven, but that is one of the hazards of inexpensive zine publishing when you try to keep the price at 75¢. *The Equalizer*, however, is one of the most promising first issues of a stripzine to hit fandom in years. Now if only he'll send us the ordering information so we can pass it on to you.

THE NEW WEIRD FANTASTIC TALES #3

$1.00 or subscriptions at $5.75 for 6 issues from Sunset Comics Gang, 9012 Evergreen Drive, Mentor, OH 44060. 5½" x 8½", 36 pages, offset on white paper, black and white covers.

This zine is a fair example of what is commonly called a "crudzine." While not as bad as some, it is still way below any level of interest. It appears to be an example of the publisher's' desire to put out a zine without much thought about actual content.

Two strips are featured in this issue: "The Timewolf," about a Viet-Nam vet "cursed by a dying shaman for his unwitting part in the devastation of the old man's village." We discover that the curse is that of lycanthropy, and an evil necromancer sends the ex-vet on a journey to find the severed head of a warlock. Things get convoluted when the ex-vet, now a werewolf, gets thrown back in time . . .and take it from there.

The second feature, "The Survivors," looks like it was written and drawn in an afternoon lunch break. It details the story of a plane crash's survivors, but neither the crude artwork not the juvenile script makes much sense.

If this zine were an exercise for the publisher's own enjoyment (?), then that's one thing. But it's not the kind of package one can expect others to buy. Expecially at $1.00 a shot.—B.L.

Trufan Confessions

by Jay Zilber

It was a great idea whose time had not yet come. What makes it a greater tragedy is that it has come and gone without notice, and nobody's the wiser for it.

This month we're going to talk about the United Fanzine Organization. Although the UFO is not yet dead—merely comatose—it is a noble experiment which does not deserve to die without a eulogy. The UFO is a fanzine editor's cooperative whose stated purpose is "to aid one another in the production and promotion of their fanzines, and to promote higher standards of quality in the fan press." There remains a remote chance that it might yet spring back into full vitality, though frankly, I think we're stretching the definition of "remote chance" by suggesting one exists. Next week they might also start selling 64 page comics for a dime.,

The genesis of the UFO spans twelve years, and can provide valuable lessons for those interested in beginning a similar endeavor. Unlike the casual comics readers, we "fans" are blessed with that strange, overwhelming urge to do more with our interest in comics than to read and collect them. We've got to *communicate* about them. When not buying and trading and reading comics, we're analyzing and discussing them, and publishing fanzines about them. And comics fans *organize*. We have intricate indexes of our collections, dutifully recorded in notebooks or file cards. Who amongst us has never sat in the middle of a room, surrounded by piles upon piles of four-color pulp that are never large enough to satisfy . . .sorting, cataloguing, alphabetizing and organizing until the wee hours of the morning?

And when we're done with our collections, we organize *ourselves*, with regional clubs, conventions and apas, and we find any excuse to build a new organization. That the United Fanzine Organization came to exist in the first place is therefore not at all surprising; in fact, it was virtually inevitable

Here was a group where experienced fan editors (faneds) could pass along their acquired knowledge about the hows and whys of amateur publishing to those just starting out. Admirable, unpretentious goals, and some intriguing built-in potentials, yet for most of the UFO'S history they were most elusive. Even its stated goals remained more theory than practice. In twelve years the UFO accomplished little more than to function as a minor fanzine trading club. Beset by rapid membership turnover and unstable leadership, disagreement on how best to pursue their group interests and a lack of funds to develop them, the organization's own first name rapidly became a gross misnomer.

A battle of egos

The concept of the United Fanzine Organization cooperative grew out of a climate that had enveloped the fan press by the late 1960s. Offset printing was no longer an unheard-of luxury; by 1968 it was almost taken for granted as the only way to publish a fanzine. Comics fandom

had by then grown large enough to support a few zines with circulations approaching or exceeding 1,000, at which point the old ditto and mimeo machines were useless. Even relatively small-scale zines were discovering the advantages of quick-copy offset printing. Yet in spite of offset's relatively modest cost and infinitely greater veratility, there will always be something "magic" about those old, purple ditto-zines. Contrary to some popular beliefs, there is nothing inherently wrong with a fanzine having a limited or specialized following. And in the eyes of some, ditto masters are not so much a handicap as they are a challenge. The ditto process allows you to produce fanzines that are both inexpensive and graphically superb, while maintaining the intimate flavor of old-time fandom.

It was that philosophy which prompted a small group of diehard ditto fans, spearheaded by Carl Gafford, to establish a cooperative of (mostly) ditto fanzine publishers in 1968, in order to promote their favorite downtrodden medium. Originally called the Blue Plaque Publications (BPP), these now-rare fanzines have a sort of legendary status in the annals of the fan press. There are few still among us who can recall first-hand the incredible material, ama-strips, and fan fiction in the sixteen issues of Gafford's own *Minotaur*, Gordon Matthew's *Coffinworm*, Chuck Robinson's *Comique*, Ed Romero's *Realm*, Charlie Smith's *Irrational*...These were like oases in a sea of offset ink, and yet they were only slightly better known to the mainstream of fandom a decade ago as they are today. (Of course, this was partly by design, since most BPP publishers necessarily limited their circulations to whatever print run they could squeeze out of their ditto equipment, usually no more than 250 copies tops.) The BPP's promotion amounted to little more than mutually plugging the entire BPP line in each member zine. That sort of incestuous publicity (plus word of mouth) was really all they needed at first.

In time, however, it became clear that the group had a much greater, unrealized potential—that of bringing the fan press to the fans. There were no comic shops then, no national or regional distributors who wholesaled or retailed fanzines. Few but the most experienced (and wealthiest) entrepreneurs had the resources to get their fanzine to its greatest possible audience. Limited networks of friends were the best that a two-bit publisher could hope for. A plug or review in a major zine, a lucky mention in a Marvel letter column, an ⅛th-page ad in the reigning adzine of the day—beyond that, the only way to get a low-budget fanzine to new fans was lots of freebie copies. The publisher suffered...and so did fandom at large, which was limited in its choice of fan press reading material to a handful of major slickzines and artzines. Even when the comics shops and distributors came along, they were unwilling to deal with any but these professional looking pro-or semi-prozines.

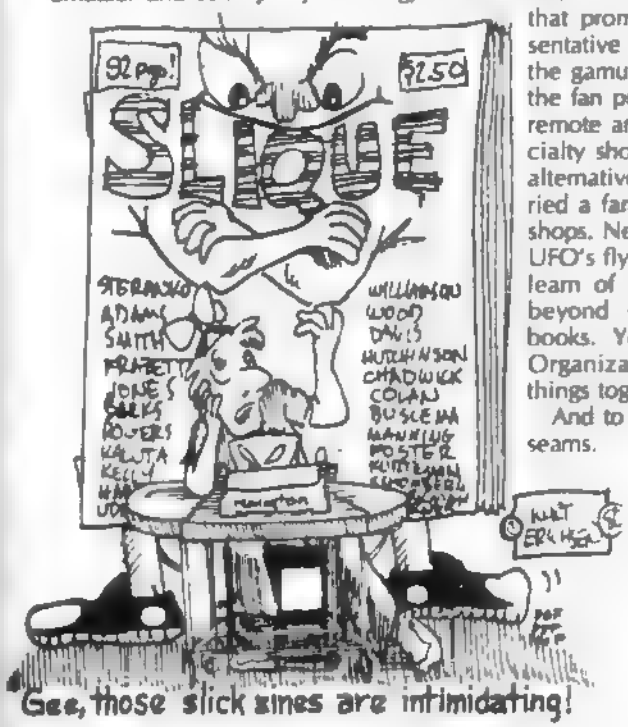
Certainly the BPP was aware of the role they might have been able to play in serving as a fanzine distributor, but its membership began to drift apart before any real action could be taken. Ed Romero went on to become Artie E. Romero of Everyman Studios and *Cascade Comics Monthly*; Carl Gafford set fandom aside and turned pro; Gordon Matthews vanished without a trace. The rest of the BPP-ites went off on their own tangents, and with the publication of *Minotaur* #16 in August 1972, Blue Plaque Publications quietly faded away.

For a short time, anyway, until Steve Keeter became interested in reviving the concept. With the help of original member Chuck Robinson, he successfully brought back the co-op with a fresh crop of new faces and fanzines. This group was somehow less memorable, perhaps deservedly obscure, for they just didn't measure up to the old BPP. The group had now been

A UFO Portrait Gallery

retitled The United Fanzine Organization, since it was clear that it would serve much more than ditto fanzines. But the names and titles were remarkably lightweight this time around: Larry Johson (*The Comet*), Mike Canuel (*Fanscene*), Jim Main (*PFFSTZ!*), Rod Snyder (*Unreal*), and Steve Keeter's own *Mantra*, to name a few. Then Kurt Erichsen came into the group with his fiction-zine *Endeavor* and ascended to the chairmanship when Keeter was unable to continue. Under Kurt's three-year tenure, the UFO began to take steps to establish itself, and acquired an additional office of Publicity Manager to handle advertising projects. Still, little progress was made in bringing the group to the attention of mainstream fandom. The UFO developed into a social club of sorts for its small-scale publishers, and the illusion of importance seemed to satisfy most of its membership.

This membership was in the process of turning over again when I came into the UFO with my old *Fandom Funnies* title. When Kurt Erichsen went to grad school I picked up the chairmanship, and the burden of recruiting the newest generation fell to me along with it. A simple task, I thought, until I discovered through trial and error that the UFO had serious structural flaws that prevented many of the best major and minor publishers from taking any serious interest. It had been designed after all, to accomodate ditto and small-scale publishers and the UFO's constitution was based on the fallacy that everyone is publishing for the same reasons and for the same audience. The UFO was too rules-oriented, and beyond quietly trading their fanzines the group just wasn't accomplishing anything. Clearly the UFO now had to become a progressive, vital force in both amatuer and semi-pro publishing, or else it would shortly become dead.



During my tenure I deemphasized the rules as best I could, rounded up what few new members were to be found, and we set out to conquer the world. I spent a year as chairman, and another year as publicity manager for the UFO, during which I outlined and developed a number of elaborate long-term (and long overdue) promotional projects. Gradually, the UFO began to catch on again until it reached its strongest point ever. Only last year its roster boasted such luminaries as Gary Groth's and Kim Thompson's *The Comics Journal*; Mark Gruenwald's *Omniverse*; Bill Marcinko's *AFTA*; and long-time publisher Bob Jennings' *Comic World*. Also member-zines were lesser-known but excellent projects like Rich Howell's *Portia Prinz of the Glamazons*, Marilyn Bethke's *Instant Gratification*, Bill Sherman's humorzine *Ludicrous Situations*, Bill Mutschler's *Graphex*, Tom Mason's *Gizmo*, my own *Fandom Funnies* and *Glx Spizl Glaah*, Chris Rock's various mini-zines, and several more—not to mention that James Van Hise was in the process of joining with his distinguished *Rocket's Blast Comicollector*. At this point, my own overextended commitments made it impossible for me to continue in office. Bill Mutschler briefly ascended to the chairmanship and continued to build on our limited successes, until he too was forced to resign for personal reasons.

Despite this muddled transition, the group now consisted of a strong base of diverse, widely-read, top-notch fanzines, with the support necessary to turn twelve years of rhetoric into reality. The UFO could now move to fill that niche in fandom which had been inadequately filled for too long; it could now become that prominent, reliable source of representative fanzines which, as a group, ran the gamut through the entire spectrum of the fan press. Those comics fans living in remote areas not serviced by comics specialty shops could turn to the UFO as an alternative fanzine distributor which carried a far wider selection than any of the shops. New fans could glance through the UFO's flyers and literature, and from there learn of the fannish universe that exists beyond sorting and cataloging comic books. Yes indeed, the United Fanzine Organization was finally ready to put things together.

And to celebrate, we tore it apart at the seams.

As with any large group of such diverse minds, there were naturally differences of opinion, and the UFO was often just like one big, unhappy family. Disagreements came out of members' deeply-rooted and differing conceptions of what fanzines should be; the legitimate notion of keeping small-scale projects on a small scale may have been vital to one member's interests, and totally contrary to another's. Certain members were feuding even before they joined the UFO, and they merrily dragged their heated arguments into the monthly UFO Newsletter, *Tetragrammaton Fragments*. This combination newsletter apa was intended to provide a forum for discussion of UFO business, to encourage thoughtful constructive criticism of one another's fanzines. Instead, it devolved into angry insult matches and mindless criticisms of one another's sensibilities, personalities, and ancestry. Massive ego clashes soon led to massive resignations. Squabbles over minor rules and guidelines blew so out of proportion that they became the burning issues of the day, leading to charges that the UFO was incapable of getting anything done except making and enforcing rules. A few members went on to bigger and better things, as many former fanzine editors do. But others drifted out from frustration, apathy, and disgust over the UFO's disintegration. And while this turnover was certainly not unprecedented, there were no enthusiastic new faces to replace the tired old ones this time. Perhaps the intensity of the UFO's disunity frightened them off . . . or perhaps there just aren't any more enthusiastic new faneds. In any case, having now brought in so many "big-name" slickzines into the group (however briefly), the UFO had become an intimidating, elitist clique of self-appointed fan press representatives—and a washed-out clique at that. No neo or veteran faned could be expected to want anything to do with a group like that.

In less than a year, the co-op dwindled to little more than a vegetable. To this day a sporadic UFO Newsletter still appears, but nobody contributes to it. What few members are still listed on the active roster no longer support this idle claim with participation. I suspect most are simply too disinterested at this point to bother with a formal resignation.

Twelve years down the tubes. *Twelve years!* Is there anyone left to be outraged by our stupidity?

Granted, the UFO was not the first such fanzine co-op, nor is it likely to be the last. There has always been, always will be a great need for the sort of services a fanzine co-op can provide. Perhaps having taken a closer look at how the UFO failed, a more courageous generation can learn from our mistakes and avoid the pitfalls that we could not forsee without the benefit of hindsight. ●

Mapping Skartaris—

an in-depth interview with

Mike Grell

Mike Grell is the creator, writer and artist of Warlord, *the only recently created comic book offering a new world to the already established comic book universes. Previous to his creating* Warlord, *he illustrated a number of features for DC including* Green Lantern/Green Arrow *and* The Legion of Super-Heroes.

The Warlord is Travis Morgan, a U.S. Air Force Lt. Colonel, who escaping Soviet planes, bails out over the North Pole (thinking it the Yukon) and falls not to the Earth's surface, but through to the Earth's core into a prehistoric world called Skartaris. Morgan's adventures have to date been chronicled in over thirty issues of Warlord. *The following interview with Mike Grell was conducted in March.*

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FEATURE: *Warlord* is the only major DC title which bears no relation to the overall Earth-One, Earth-Two DC continuity. Did you set out to create something totally unrelated to the overall continuity?

GRELL: Exactly. *Warlord* was created as a newspaper strip and the fact that it doesn't tie in with any of the other related DC universes is at my insistence. For the same reason that when DC was doing *Tarzan*, people kept writing in and asking for a team-up between Tarzan and Superman or Tarzan and Batman. Naturally, any crossovers between the two would totally destroy the credibility of the Tarzan character. I felt that the same thing would happen with the Warlord. I've seen too many instances where they did team-ups between Kamandi and Superman. I think the ultimate was Jonah Hex and the Justice League. I mean, that's sheer stupidity. So I set out right from the start and say, this is not Earth-One, not Earth-Two. For all intents and purposes the Warlord's world is the real world. He may read a Superman or Batman comic book, but that's the extent of the existence of the other DC characters as far as the Warlord is concerned.

FEATURE: Do you think it's good for a company such as DC or Marvel to have some titles that aren't directly linked to the overall continuity?

GRELL: I think so. DC has very few, actually. The next thing they'll do, I suppose, is Scalphunter and the Legion of Super-Heroes. (Laughter) I think it makes it easier to achieve continuity if you have, for example, all the Marvel characters existing on the same plane. DC's characters essentially all exist in DC's world and the only reason they had to come up with Earth-One and Earth-Two was to explain the sudden appearance of the Justice Society.

FEATURE: How much freedom do you have with *Warlord* in terms of stories and art and the direction in which you want to see the series go?

GRELL: I have almost total freedom. About the extent of the editorial control is input that Jack Harris gives me with regard to story ideas. If he thinks up a clever plot twist, he'll call me and ask me about it. But ultimately it's my decision whether or not it goes in the book. So from that standpoint I do have total control.

FEATURE: Considering that comics companies have pretty tight control over the books they publish, why do you think DC allowed you the freedom to create pretty much what you wanted?

GRELL: Well, *Warlord* has been on the top of *The Comic Reader*'s poll as far as the DC line goes in the direct sales throughout the country. In terms of sales

I'LL SAY THIS FOR THOSE RO BANTS: THEY CERTAINLY ARE A DETERMINED BREED! I HAD TO KILL ONE OF THEM THREE TIMES!
I JUST HOPE MARIAN DIDN'T RUN INTO ANY OF THEM!

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AT THIS MOMENT, OUTSIDE THE FORTRESS, MORGAN'S COMPANIONS ARE MAKING A GALLANT BATTLE FOR LIFE
WE KILL THEM BY THE SCORE AND THEY STILL KEEP COMING! IS THERE NO END TO THEIR NUMBER?
THE HANDSOME OF HELL ARE LEGION!

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alone that's enough reason for a company to give me all the freedom I need. But there are one or two other things as well: probably that *Warlord* is my baby. To my knowledge I'm the only writer/artist in the business right now who has created, written and drawn a feature right from the start. And that coupled with the fact that *Warlord*, though not an epic on the classic scale, is a continuing storyline. I'm the only one who knows where it's going and how it's going to turn out. I think that's a good enough reason for them to keep me on the book.

FEATURE: Do you feel there should be more writer/artists in the medium, that it would be good for comics?

GRELL: It's hard to say. It depends on the amount of knowledge and ability that the other artist has. Personally, I started out with the idea of doing comic strips and the effort I put forth always had to do with the writing and drawing. It more or less came naturally. I think if you have enough imagination to create good, entertaining pictures, you've got enough imagination to create an entertaining story — if you can write. Not everybody can.

FEATURE: You've mentioned that *Warlord* evolved from a comic strip presentation called *Savage Empire*. How much does *Warlord* differ from your original conceptions for *Savage Empire*?

GRELL: Quite a bit. The characters' names are all different, with the exception of Demos. That was such a good villain that I decided to keep using it. The basic looks of the character are considerably the same, with the exception of changes in the costume and style over the years.

FEATURE: Were the changes made your changes, or editorial changes?

GRELL: They were changes that I made before I offered it to DC. The direction of *Warlord* for the first couple of stories is very similar to *Savage Empire*, but the development of the story is one hundred percent different. The setting is different, the motivations are different and the characters are all almost completely different, except for Demos and the Tara character who is the same as she was.

FEATURE: In newspaper strips you write for eight week continuities. Did you have a number of continuities in mind when you developed *Savage Empire*? And did you have to alter your plot structures for comic books?

GRELL: I had about a year's worth of *Savage Empire* plots and using that as a rough outline I did the first half dozen stories in *Warlord*. If it had run as a continuity feature in a newspaper it would have easily taken a year to tell. A newspaper strip has the advantage over a comic book in that you don't have to worry about only having seventeen pages to tell your story. If you discover certain sections of the storyline that merit extra time, you can give it to them. You can take three weeks to advance the plot very slowly but advance the characterizations a tremendous amount. With comic books you have to jump right in at the beginning with action and advance the plot the first few pages and then have all kinds of conflict and then wrap it up in the end.

FEATURE: Do you have a preference for working in newspaper strips or comic books?

GRELL: If I could get a newspaper strip I'd quit comic books tomorrow.

FEATURE: Doing similar types of material?

GRELL: Doing almost anything, really. I love comic strips. I started out wanting to do comic strips and worked for about a year with Dale Messick on *Brenda Starr* and that year was one of the most enjoyable I've spent. That's not to sell comic books short, it's just that everybody has his own little dreams and my dream was always casting myself as the Jack Lemmon character in *How to Murder Your Wife*.

FEATURE: When you were Dale Messick's assistant, did she have any influence on your approach to your artwork? Did you learn any tricks or techniques from her?

GRELL: I learned to work very, very fast. I found that her style and mine were so incompatible and that the only way to duplicate it was to do an entire week's worth of strips in about two and a half to three hours. She had another assistant at the time who would do stiff pencil layouts and the lettering and inking one or two of the backgrounds. I would generally repencil or ink directly over the figures in Dale's style. Occasionally, I did everything except Brenda Starr's body and face.

FEATURE: Dale Messick would do Brenda . . .

GRELL: Yes, she would do Brenda to get the fashions and the looks exactly right. I found that in order to make my style duplicate hers I had to work as fast as I could possibly move the brush.

FEATURE: Have you always been interested in newspaper strips?

GRELL: I always read comic strips as much if not more than comic books, and when I decided to become a cartoonist I did it with the idea of becoming a comic strip artist.

FEATURE: Did you have any particular favorites who influenced you as an artist and storyteller?

GRELL: I was influenced greatly by Al Capp, who . . . Al Capp doesn't need anyone to blow his horn for him. He was one of the absolute masters. With that in mind, I devoted most of my early studies to learning how to draw comic figures . . . big foot style.

I was always a Hal Foster fan. *Prince Valiant* was almost like a bible around my

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house. Everyone read it. I like to think that Hal Foster had a certain amount of influence on my drawing ability. At least he taught me what a comic strip could be.

And of course there was Al Williamson, who's still one of my favorites. And Neal Adams, obviously. And believe it or not, Joe Orlando. When I started working for DC he used to sit me down and put a tissue overlay over the pages I'd bring in and redraw some of the figures and show me how to correct them. He took a lot of time and put a lot of effort into making me what I am right now.

FEATURE: Do you have any writing influences?

GRELL: Edgar Rice Burroughs and Mickey Spillane. Burroughs because of the incredible fantasies that he was able to create. He spins a web of fantasy around the reader and just sucks you in to the point where before you've read a dozen pages you're willing to believe anything this guy says.

Mickey Spillane's technique is one that I use. He writes the last chapter first. When I write a comic book I know how the story is going to end before I write the first page. Another technique that Spillane uses . . . for Spillane, the ultimate ending for a novel would be to conceal the mystery or the climax from the reader until the very last word of the entire book. He says that the first page of the book is what sells that book; the last page of the book is what sells your next book. I try to follow that. I generally leave a little teaser at the end of my stories that I hope makes the reader want to pick it up next time. But I also try not to lead them on falsely and have continued stories where they have to come back and buy another book just to find out what's going on. I think that's a terrible rip off.

FEATURE: What are the differences working with Jack Harris who's editing *Warlord* now as opposed to Joe Orlando who edited the book at the beginning?

GRELL: Jack more or less gives me free rein, whereas Joe Orlando kept a tighter control on what was going into the book. I still had total control over everything but had to do more of a selling job with Joe than I ever had to do with Jack. Jack has come to the point where he respects my judgment and more or less gives me a free hand on anything that I want to do. I can't think of any time when I've run into a conflict with Jack, whereas I used to occasionally with Joe.

FEATURE: You mentioned before that when you were working on *Savage Empire* you had a year's worth of story plotted. It seems as though you still plot far in advance and give hints of stories to come — for example, backgrounds showing the remnants of a long dead, advanced civilization. Do you have long range plans which allow you to drop hints long before the story would actually be told?

GRELL: Yes. In fact part of that has already been taken care of in a story called "The Challenge" where we discover that Travis Morgan has had many incarnations in the past, one of those being a citizen of Atlantis whose people fled the great cataclysm and one of the fleets of ships was blown off course far to the north and entered the north polar opening of Skartaris.

The stuff that's planted there along the line . . . nothing is there by accident. It's all there because eventually, it's going to be picked up on and developed more fully.

FEATURE: The supporting characters in the book have been out of the series for awhile, turning up only in the Wizard World story. Are there plans to bring them back into the regular continuity?

GRELL: In the current story (#34) we pick up back in the age of the wizard kings where Morgan travels back in time and meets up with his old friends Machiste and Maria. What's going to happen is that since DC has increased each book to twenty five pages of art, there will be a seventeen page Warlord story and an eight page Wizard World story. For the time being, Machiste and Maria will continue back there. They're gone but not forgotten

FEATURE: With the page increase, do you plan to do some full length Warlord stories?

GRELL: Absolutely. One out of every three or four books will probably be full length, although it may be as little as one out of every five.

FEATURE: Are there plans to have the Warlord return to the surface, playing off the contrast in worlds and how he's changed?

GRELL: Issue #35 has him back on the surface in a crazy story that was inspired . . . that is one time when we can blame everything on Jack Harris (laughter). It seems that Jack had himself a pepperoni pizza with poison mushrooms or something before he went to bed and the next morning called me up with this incredible dream that he had. It sounded so wild that we adapted it and came up with a story in which the Warlord is very briefly back on the surface

I have a story that will probably be one of the twenty-five page stories that will have him coming back up on the surface and encountering people in a more or less realistic situation instead of being totally off the wall like we're doing in the gambit story that Jack dreamed up. There are a couple of other things that are going to happen in the next four or five issues that will give everyone a greater insight into Travis Morgan. There are a lot of things in his past that haven't been brought out before. Finally coming to the surface, you'll get a look at Morgan through other people's eyes

FEATURE: How do you see your audience? Do you create the stories for yourself or with that audience in mind?

GRELL: That's very hard. I would imagine that my audience runs somewhere between age 12 and 49 (laughter). I assume a lot of the things I put in my stories are beyond some of the younger readers. But I do draw the stories with the intention that even someone who couldn't read at all could look at the pictures and understand basically what's going on and hopefully make him curious enough that he'd take the time to sit down and read it

FEATURE: Are the double-page spreads in *Warlord* your idea?

GRELL: Yes.

FEATURE: Were they initiated as a design technique or as a matter of deadlines?

GRELL: Oh, no. I used to be flabbergasted by the two page spreads that Joe Kubert and Nestor Redondo used to do in *Rima*. I thought it was just outstanding and de-

cided that as soon as I was able to work in that format, every book would have two page spreads.

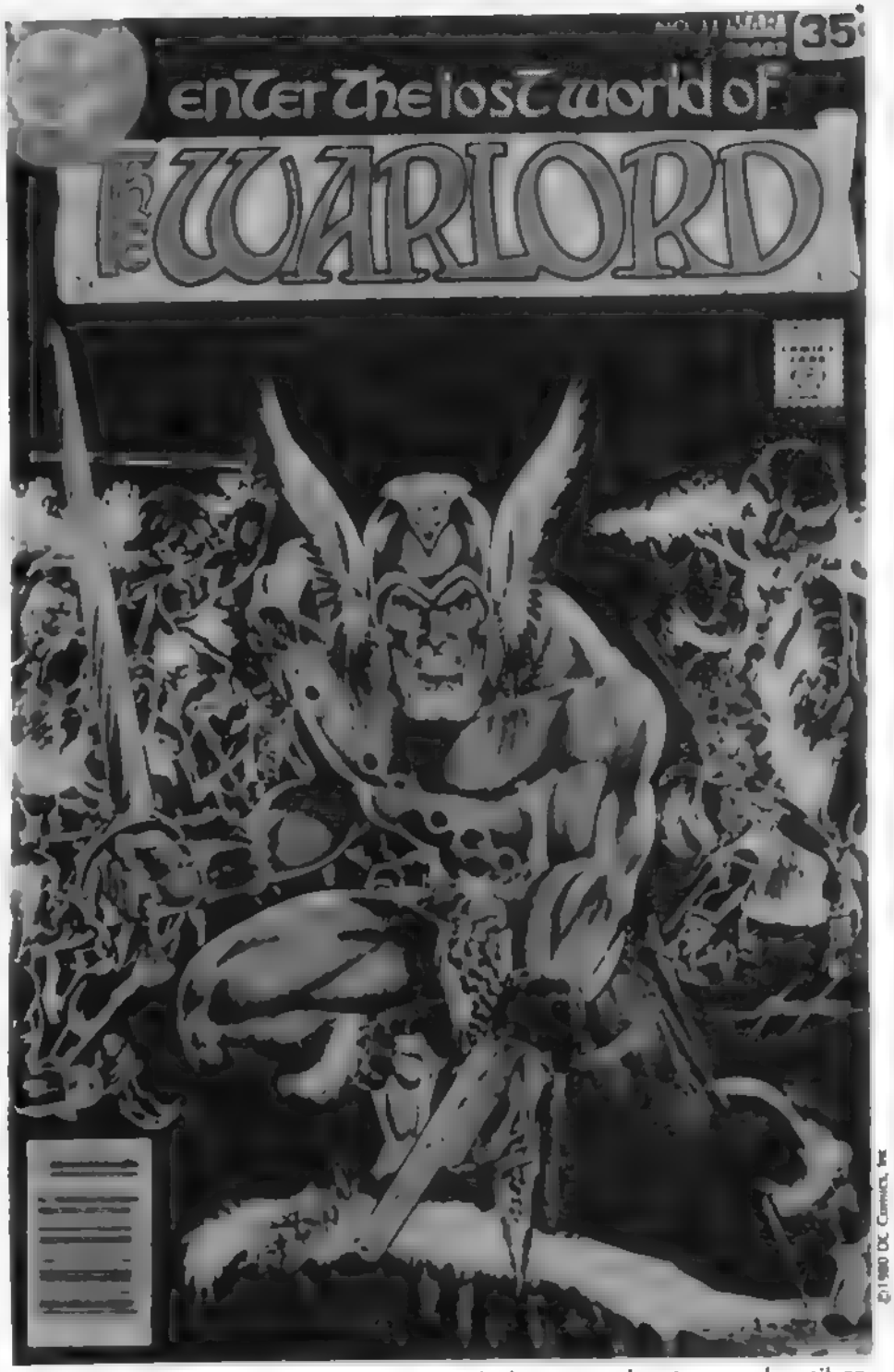
There's a couple of reasons for using the two page splash. One, it's a chance to go hog-wild with the artwork. The other is that Julie Schwartz taught me a long time ago that you have to get the action started immediately in the story. Very few of my stories begin any other way than with a sudden attack or a sudden burst of action in the first two pages. If I can't do an all-out battle sequence or an all-out action sequence within the first couple of pages I can at least get the chance to do a drawing that will attract the reader and catch his eyes

FEATURE: Issue #14, which was comprised mostly of full and half pagers, was almost a portfolio in comic book form. Do you feel it's good to lighten up every so often and show what you can do with the artwork?

GRELL: That issue, called "All Men Are Mine," was a grand experiment. I think that experimentation within the format should be done more. I've done a couple of different things that have worked out very well. I've done the bottom strip story where I first introduced characters from the age of the wizard kings and that story was related to the main storyline which was going on up above. We got a lot of very positive reaction from that. I was surprised at the amount of positive reaction we got from "All Men Are Mine," because quite frankly, I didn't like it after I saw it in print. When I came up with the concept I was saying this is going to be great; all the time I was drawing the story I was saying this is going to be great. And when I finally saw the book I said this is junk (laughter). There was not enough story there. If I had had an editor at the time who would have taken a look at it and said, "C'mon, Grell, what are you trying to do here?" and made me go back and write about three times as much dialogue and story, I still could have gotten away with doing all those half and full page splashes. I don't think that was a bad concept; I just think the story that went along with it was poorly executed

FEATURE: Do you think that experimentation in design of a comic book should be tried more often?

GRELL: Absolutely, because you never know when you're going to stumble on something that's going to be a real smash. That's one of the things that makes it so good for me working in the type of situation that I do in that if I get an idea or some inspiration, I can try it out with virtually no interference from the editors. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. The death story, which I just talked about, is a case where it worked partially. The art fans really liked that story, the hard-core comic fans who read everything religiously spotted the shortcomings right off the bat. We get a tremendous amount of mail on the book.



FEATURE: You inked the Wizard World story yourself. Do you prefer inking your own material over having someone else do it?

GRELL: That's really hard to say. I gave up the inks on *Warlord* because of the time schedule that was involved when the book went monthly. I gave up the inks on *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* to allow myself more time to devote to pencil drawing. I felt that by eliminating the inking work I would become a better pencil artist. And I think in a lot of ways I have. However, the inking that has been done on *Warlord* doesn't show it at all. The difference between what I turn in and what you see in print is like night and day. I think we get almost as much mail on *Warlord* as on *The Legion of Super-Heroes*.

FEATURE: Did you enjoy working on the *Legion*, and would you like to work on it again if you had the time?

GRELL: I enjoyed working on the *Legion* when I first started and I enjoyed working on it when Cary Bates was writing it. The fun went out of it when Jim Shooter started writing it. To tell you the truth, the book is a killer book. You've got twenty-six different characters to draw, twenty-six costumes to remember, and twenty-six different faces and hairstyles. If I had the choice of doing *The Legion of Super-Heroes* again, or having root canal, I'd probably pick the root canal (laughter).

continued on page 62

(Midnight in the crowded comics vaults of P. Benno Gillis:)

CAPTAIN MARVEL #32: You're just saying that to cover up for your own lack of originality!

BLACKHAWK #225: That's just the sort of ego-inflated response I expected from you, you pretentious piece of bombast!

LIFE WITH ARCHIE #17: Hey, what's going on over there?

FANTASY MASTERPIECES #1: Oh, it's a mess! Things used to be so nice in here, with the Marvels in one place (all the FFs together, one after the other, and so forth), the DCs over *there*, and us reprints and miscellaneous—

LIFE WITH ARCHIE #17: WHO'S miscellaneous?

FANTASY MASTERPIECES #1: You are, you stupid humor book! But ever since Gillis got lazy and stacked those two guys together, we haven't had a moment's peace! It's enough to curl your spine!

BLACKHAWK #225: The thing you simply don't understand is that we're just comic books! Nothing more! We've never been meant for anything more than entertainment—fun! And when guys like you aspire to AHT—no wonder you got cancelled!

MARVEL: Look who's talking! *I* didn't have my characters dress up in clown costumes! The Listener—in a costume covered with ears!

BLACKHAWK: Ah-HA! You *did* have a story with all these clowns running around, putting noses and greasepaint—

MARVEL: Gotcha yourself. That was my twin brother in Starlindom, *STRANGE TALES* #181

BLACKHAWK: Anyway, I take no responsibility for my later progeny. In *my* pages, we still had *uniforms* and were a fighting team. That was our thing, and we did it well, and people still remember us fondly. That's all a comic book should ask for.

MARVEL: But don't you see? That's boring! It's not entertainment versus "Aht", to use your pronunciation, but good entertainment versus mediocre entertainment. You're mediocre, 225!

BLACKHAWK: *Mr.* 225 to you, 32.

MARVEL: You're mediocre, and you were respected and enjoyed because there was nothing to compare you with. It was only when guys like us started showing up, books with *characterization, scope, innovation*, that you were revealed for the pap you truly are.

BLACKHAWK: Characterization? What characterization can you have with cartoon characters and word balloons with no more than 35 words in them? You just *think* you've got characterization because you're second-generation.

MARVEL: Yes, I know all about Blackhawk originally being Polish, but I don't see what—

BLACKHAWK: Dimwit! I mean the fact that you're produced by fans who grew up reading comics and precious little else! As a result, they think that changing the *shticks* around makes it real characterization, while they're as far removed from Flaubert and Chekhov as you can get. Oh yes, I'm not as dumb as I look: I just know my limitations.

MARVEL: Limitations, limitations! An art form isn't a limitation, it's a tool! Sure there are certain things comics can't do and oil paintings can't move! So what? Does that make them bad?

BLACKHAWK: This abstract stuff is all very nice, but we're talking about you average 12-cent DC or Marvel—

VOICE FROM THE COMIC READER PILE, FAR AWAY: It's going up to 50 cents!

BLACKHAWK: Is it? Sheesh! Your regular DC or Marvel comic. Look, it's bought by kids, or at very best by folks wanting to waste a little time, get a little familiar fantasy, and that's all. They want to see the same old heartwarming shticks, us going HAWKAAAA and our cute dialects and the War Wheel and all that. And when the audience changes, the shticks change, they no longer want the old ones. That's what happened to us. You just found a new shtick: Cosmic Cubes and Universe-destroying Gods. That's all.

MARVEL: If you think people really *want* shticks, I pity you. They'll *settle* for them. What they really want is to be surprised, delighted, thrilled. You can't do that with something the reader's used to. I'll grant you there is a limit: you can't have the hero's girl friend choke on a piece of meat at a lunch counter and die, although that happens to real people every day. They really *want* to see things they've never seen before, but always suspected, maybe semi-consciously, were possible. Maybe we can't be Chekhov (but what if Chekhov wrote a comic book?)—

BLACKHAWK: He wouldn't.

MARVEL: —but we can be things our audience hasn't seen before. And that's art. Maybe limited art, depending on our audience, but art.

BLACKHAWK: Listen, I never said there's anything wrong with novelty! We were constantly coming up with new villains —the Split-Man, Mr. Quick-Change—and, why, within my pages, we even had Queen Killer Shark, who—

MARVEL: I know, I know, was really Lady Blackhawk turned bad! That's just tired manipulation of formula. Lady Blackhawk is nothing more than Supergirl or Batwoman, and the evil bit is nothing more than Star Sapphire done badly.

BLACKHAWK: Star Sapphire?

MARVEL: Don't you ever talk to your buddies the *Green Lanterns* any more?

GREEN LANTERN #16: Yeah, remind me to tell you all about it one night!

MARVEL: And it's a tired formula anyway. One of the group gets turned bad by means of a potion—yawn—and of course, like the sexist you are, you had it be the woman—

Guilty Fantasies

by Peter B. Gillis

The conversationists: Captain Marvel *#32*, Blackhawk *#225* and Mystery in Space *#77*

BLACKHAWK: Sexist? SEXIST??

MARVEL: Yeah. Sexist! And why not? You have these seven guys who live together on an island with no women, dress up in black leather, walk away arm-in-arm singing song—

BLACKHAWK: Now that's low, that's really low—I suppose you'll be sniggering about Batman and Robin next—

MARVEL: All right, all right, I apoligize—but the point I'm trying to make is that these things are never the "simple, heart-warming shticks" you make them out to be. You either blindly grind out boring variations on these situations, not really knowing what you're doing, OR you are aware of things like symbolism, underlying philosophies, psychology, and use them to make the stories profound and well-thought-out rather than naive and primitive. Do you think I just had Thanos in love with Death, and Death as a beautiful woman just for the hell of it?

BLACKHAWK: But people don't *have* to read all that into it-it's just *comics*—!

MARVEL: Bull! It's *stories*! Stories about people; about good and evil; passion and pain; life and death; time and fate; and unless you do justice to them, you're not doing it well!

BLACKHAWK: But you *don't* have to plumb the depths every time you go out of the newsstands! What's wrong with simple action, when you *know* the good and evil of it? Why can't you have a simple, action-packed story, with novel twists and clever plot devices, without calling all that into question?

MYSTERY IN SPACE #77: May I say something?

MARVEL: *Mystery in Space #77*! The "Ray-gun in the Sky" Adam Strange story! You're one of my childhood favorites! Of course you can say something!

MYSTERY: You've got to realize, young book, that I'm nothing more than an exercise in abstract reasoning, like so many of Gardner Fox's stories, with some damn pretty Infantino/Anderson art. Adam, bless his heart, had absolutely no depth, nor did Alanna. All we did was present an enigma, and switch people's expectations around a couple of times.

MARVEL: I'll say! The giant, menacing ray-gun turned out to be sent by the good guy—uh—

MYSTERY: Sorkhan Vuh. I've always loved that name, myself. I'm a very different comic from you, myself. And yet you liked me. You liked me, and yet I really have nothing in me about passion and pain, time and fate.

MARVEL: Yes, but you did it so well—

MYSTERY: Yes, I did it well. You know, in a way, you're both right. 32, I'll let you know that I stood in awe of what Stan Lee and Jack Kirby did in the FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR with my beloved science fiction, and I suppose I would have been an even better book than I am if I'd had more depth to my characterization. As SF, I'd never make it in the prose market today. "Clumsy space opera", they'd call me. "Wooden."

MARVEL: Oh no, they'd never—

MYSTERY: And you, 225: you're also right. There is a place for simple exciting action stories. (I must admit you were neither).

BLACKHAWK: I never pretended to deny it—

MYSTERY: Don't get huffy. Comics *are* entertainment. But you can't do that all the time. And people don't like wallowing in passion and pain and so forth all the time either, like some of *your* Marvel books seem to do

MARVEL: But—

MYSTERY: No buts. They do. And it's wearying. You need lightness; you need wit. Why do you think your brother *Warlock* had Pip the Troll? But, as a reasoner from way back, I know this, too *Blackhawk:* you can't make an issue, a question that is, go away by ignoring it. It only makes it bigger. Ignore sex, and you get that "seven-guys-in-leather-suits" insinuation. Ignore death, and it becomes even more terrible. Ignore the subtleties of psychology, and you become brutal and stupid. So *somewhere* along the line, if you've got the audience's attention, you've got to talk about them. Now, if you'll excuse me, the acid content in my pages is acting up. Good night.

(PAUSE)

BLACKHAWK: See? I was right! Comic books have to be entertainment!

MARVEL: What are you talking about?

BLACKHAWK: He said it! People don't want to hear "life and death", and all that pretentious stuff all the time! The want lightness!

MARVEL: That's not even half of what he said! You weren't listening! That's just like you second—no, third-rate comics! You take the most superficial aspects of something real, and distort it! To you, "lightness" is Tom Thumb, the Midget Blackhawk!

BLACKHAWK: Say what you like, but he said that no comic can center itself around deep problems all the time, on intellectual stuff, and be a good comic

MARVEL: Have it your way. I'm tired of arguing with you. Just answer me one question.

BLACKHAWK: Sure. What?

MARVEL: Why are all those copies of *The Spirit* sitting over there, laughing their covers off?

(See you next time!)

The Mouse that Roared

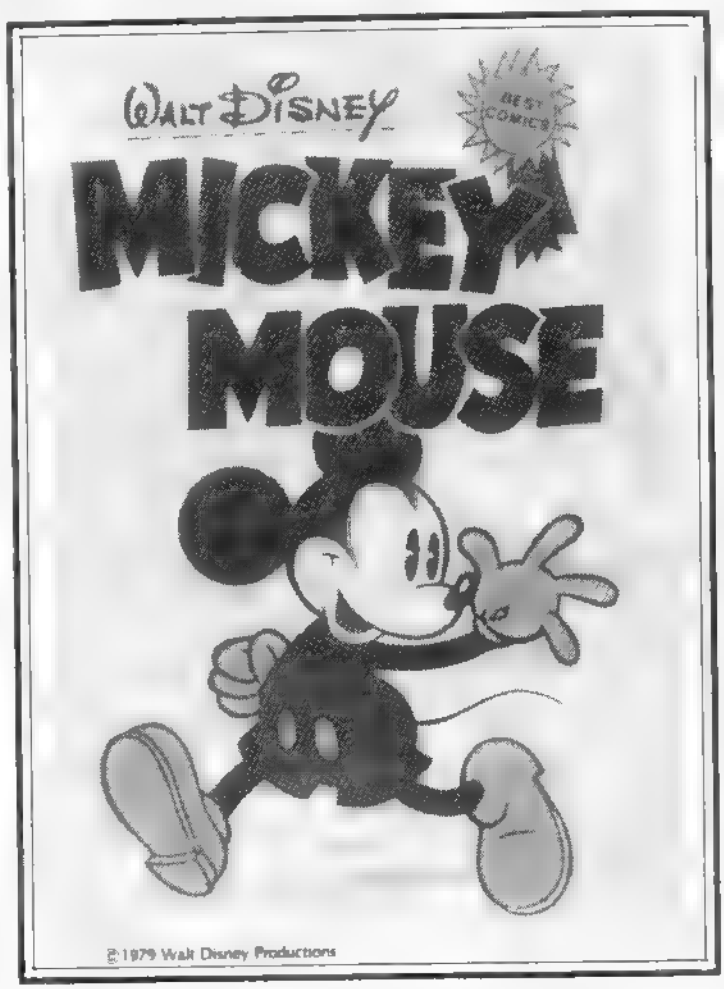
by Peter Sanderson

Most of you reading this magazine are probably already well aware of Carl Barks' great work on the comic book adventures of Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge, but may well be unaware of an equally outstanding body of work in comics centering on Walt Disney's most prominent cartoon star. This is the *Mickey Mouse* newspaper strip as it appeared from 1930 to 1945, when it was drawn and co-plotted by Floyd Gottfredson under Disney's name. There are now two large collections of Gottfredson's work available from Abbeville Press, titled, unsurprisingly enough, *Mickey Mouse* (published in 1978 and hereafter to be referred to as "M") and *Goofy* (published the next year and hereafter called "G" in this article), which, despite its name, consists of more *Mickey Mouse* newspaper adventures in which Goofy happens to play supporting roles of varying importance and size. Gottfredson never matched Barks in creating memorable new, and even archetypal characters such as Scrooge McDuck or the phenomenally lucky Gladstone Gander, or in devising such wildly imaginative concepts for his stories. But in terms of giving his characters sheer appeal for the readers and in dramatic story construction, Gottfredson is, I think, Barks' superior.

The *Mouse* newspaper strip began fifty years ago on January 13, 1930, two years after Mickey's film debut, and was at first written by Disney himself and drawn by his master animator, Ub Iwerks. Gottfredson took over the art with the May 5 strip and the writing two weeks later. He was sole writer for two years, and, afterwards co-plotted the stories with other Disney writers. (For the stories in the reprint collections the latter are Ted Osborne, Merrill de Maris, and Dick Shaw.)

Like *Uncle Scrooge*, the *Mouse* newspaper strip was basically an adventure series. Doing an adventure strip with "funny animals" gives it quite different qualities than the ones using humans. For one thing, broad humor can easily be introduced without demeaning the characters or undercutting their credibility. We expect talking cartoon animals to be funny, and so when one of Mickey's painstaking escapes from a very serious trap concludes with a slapstick joke, the shift in mood does not seem out of place. Had say, Dick Tracy or Steve Canyon wound up falling flat on his face, he would seem an utter fool. When Mickey does the same thing, there is only a sense of true comic relief in that harrowing danger has given away to a harmless and pleasing absurdity. Moreover, since we expect "funny animals" to caricature people, then we can accept exaggerated personality traits in them that would be unbelievable in realistically presented human beings. In talking animals, Goofy's stupidity, Clarabelle's rampant sex drives and the melancholia of a lesser-known character, Gloomy, are appealingly funny; in realistically portrayed humans, they would be signs of mental and emotional disturbance. Too, the lack of realism makes it easier to accept the existence of the strip's one-dimensional, utterly blackhearted villains, not to mention Mickey's own inexhaustible heroic qualities.

If you can accept talking animals, then you can accept other otherwise unbelievable elements in a strip. Gottfredson and company often introduce science fictional elements, such as an island of dinosaurs and Neanderthals ("Mickey Mouse on Cave Man Island," 1940-1 G), an island floating in the sky ("Mickey Mouse on Sky Island," 1936-7, M), a mountain hideout surrounded by a magnetic force field ("Mickey Mouse and the Dude Ranch Bandit," 1940, G) and a submarine that magnetically captures ships ("Mickey Mouse and the Pirate Submarine," 1935-6, M). The authors can play with wild coincidences with the reader's indulgence, as when Mickey, trailing a criminal along the docks, accidentally gets trapped aboard a ship that sets sail with him aboard. Just as Mickey gives up hope of completing his mission, he runs into the criminal, who happens to be traveling aboard the very same ship ("Mickey Mouse in the Foreign Legion," 1936, M). Finally, in one amazing story, ("Mickey Mouse's Adventures with Robin Hood" (1936, M), Gottfredson and company pull out all the stops in doing fantasy. Usually they try to come up with pseudo-scientific explanations for their stories' fantastic elements, but not this time, yet the tale's imaginativeness and high spirits bring their wild conceits off.



The adventure begins mundanely enough with Mickey trying to devise a better kind of plant food. He mixes together hundreds of "bodybuilding tonics" and sprays a flower with it. The plant shoots to enormous size, both in thickness and in its sky-high height. But no, this is not another variation on "Jack and the Beanstalk." Mickey then mixes together weight reducing potions to reverse the effect. Pretty soon Mickey ends up spraying himself with the reducing formula and a fly with the enlarging potion, leading to a weirdly funny chase scene with the miniaturized Mouse and Pluto fleeing from a bird-sized fly, who is obviously pleased at finally turning the tables, wielding a fly swatter and flypaper. But no, it's not a comedy version of *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, either. Evading the fly, Mickey takes shelter inside a book of Robin Hood's adventures. To his surprise, one of the Sheriff of Nottingham's men, pictured in one of the illustrations, accosts him and pulls him into the picture. Mickey finds himself in Robin Hood's world, and soon meets up with the hero himself. Interestingly,

with one exception everyone Mickey meets inside the book is a human being rather than one of the usual Disney anthropomorphic animals as in all the other reprinted stories. Mickey is delighted on his arrival in the book, but he finally gets fed up when Robin Hood and the others try to force him into marrying a Minnie Mouse lookalike who had been posing as a damsel in distress in hopes that some marriageable young hero would come try to rescue her, as Mickey did. Echoing Lewis Carroll's Alice, Mickey snaps, "You guys are nuthin' but a bunch of illustrations in a cheap picture book! Marryin' one of yer dizzy dames 'ud be bad enough —but t'marry a *picture* of one of 'em would be awful!"

Then too, since *Mickey* is a "funny animal" strip, Gottfredson can suspend the adventure format and occasionally do pure comedy stories, such as the charming "Mickey Mouse in Love Trouble" (1941, G), in which Minnie leaves Mickey for another rodent, whereupon Mickey pretends to take up with a wealthy girlfriend to make her jealous. In the farcical slapstick "Mickey Mouse and the Great Ostrich Race" (1936, G), Mickey is saddled with an unwanted ostrich that devours anything and everything, no matter how expensive. He ends up entering the bird in an insane, no-holds-barred race against wagons drawn by an assortment of other animals in order to win enough money to pay for all the damages and thereby stay out of jail.

The presence of comically drawn animals and the frequent insertions of humor also give the strip a pleasantly entertaining tone even when, as we shall see, the subject matter becomes melodramatic and even potentially chilling.

Still, these have all been qualities that any humor-adventure strip could have whether it centers on animals or not. All of this certainly applies to *Popeye*. What is most distinctive about the use of "funny animals" is the kind of characterization it permits for someone like Mickey. For the most part he is treated in the strip as an adult capable of handling mature responsibilities. Yet in the Robin Hood story Little John derides him as bein "a mere infant," and in the wartime "Mickey Mouse and the Black Crow Mystery" (1942, G), we learn that he cannot join the armed forces because he is too young. We cannot help continually being aware of Mickey's small size compared to virtually all the other characters, Gottfredson usually keeps him in short pants, and, as noted by an article in the May 1979 issue of *Natural History*, as the years went on, Mickey's round, wide-eyed face increasingly came to resemble a human child's. Futhermore, Gottfredson gives Mickey a child's high spirits and intense, open emotions. He doesn't portray Mickey's feelings subtly: whether the emotion is joy, shock, worry or anger, it seems to overwhelm the mouse, so strongly is it stamped on his face.

In short, Mickey represents a child who is as intelligent and capable as any adult and more so than most. Carl Barks aficionados should be familiar with this device. Portrayed as ducks, Donald and Uncle Scrooge have more appeal than they would were they humans: there is something magically childlike about them too. But they are nevertheless depicted as adults by Barks, though they are dominated by childlike egotism and greed. The ones who invariably save the day are Huey, Dewey and Louie, the children who so often manifest the common sense and skill that their elders lack. The same principle lies behind Howard the Duck, another short, highly emotional being surrounded by taller people (adults) in "a world he never made," i.e., one that the adults made. Howard has an adult consciousness, but he still feels out of place in the insane world that maturity, or the shift of the cosmic axis, thrust him into. Feiffer's book *Tantrum* provides another extension of the theme.

Goofy then becomes Mickey's slow-witted but highly protective older brother. in "Mickey Mouse, Mighty Whalehunter" (1938, G) he insists that Mickey get a job aboard the ship along with him, despite his puny size. The perennial archvillain of the series, the enormous, powerful, blustering Peg-Leg Pete, becomes the archetypal bully, forever tormenting the smaller mouse. (Peg-Leg Pete, the giant black cat from the first released Mickey cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, is so named because of the wooden "peg" he wears as an artificial limb. Later, apparently, he grew the missing leg back, perhaps so as not to offend cripples, and became the comic books' "Black Pete," now known as just plain "Pete.")

An important element of several of the stories is Mickey's struggle to win the recognition by various authority figures (surrogate parents) that he is indeed the equal of any adult, and perhaps even the superior. In "Black Crow Mystery" and "Mighty Whalehunter," he is assigned minor, humdrum work but finally gets the chance to prove his abilities and wins the respect of the farmer and captain. In the Foreign Legion story Mickey has several triumphant moments of recognition, first when the Colonel takes his side in a quarrel with Pete, then when Mickey watches an abusive corporal straighten up and salute him on learning the mouse is now a lieutenant, and finally when the Colonel expresses his gratitude to the mouse for saving a score of men from being killed. Gottfredson emphasizes through Mickey's thrilled reactions how important this recognition is. The whaling story adds another element in that Pete's actions throw suspicion of sabotage on Mickey; the Captain reacts like a father whose son has failed him, and when Mickey returns he soundly upbraids the Captain for having so little faith in him.

As years pass, Mickey's heroic prowess becomes so widely known that a scientist, the police and even government intelligence seek him out to go on dangerous missions. Mickey always reacts with ecstatic excitement. he is like a little boy who has achieved his dream of going on a constant series of adventures. In "Mickey Mouse in the Jewel Robbery" (1942, G), he yawns in utter boredom at a party until some jewels are stolen. "Boy! What a *peach* of a party! And to think I almost went home!" In "Mickey Mouse Runs His Own Newspaper" (1935, M), which, surprisingly, deals believably with links between organized crime and corrupt public officials, Minnie says at the end, "Won't it be nice to run the paper without fear of gangsters?" Mickey replies, "Well, I kinda had enough of newspaper life!" He also has a child's attention span: with no adventures attached, what fun is everyday work?

The measure of Mickey's optimism is his ability to derive so much enjoyment from the real dangers which he confronts. Death is rarely a presence in Barks's work: the Beagle Boys and Magica de Spell want to impoverish Scrooge but not to kill him. Gottfredson, though, leaves us in no doubt that Pete and others of his villains are willing to murder the mouse, who is very mortal indeed. The supreme example of this, and the best of the reprinted stories, is "Mickey Mouse Outwits the Phantom Blot" (1939, G). The Blot, like the Gleam in "Jewel Robbery," anticipates the costumed villains of later comics. Dressed like a black ghostlike silhouette, the Blot ensnares Mickey in a long series of convincingly lethal traps, from which the mouse always makes the narrowest of last-minute escapes. "I wouldn't be so heartless as to hang you," says the Blot soothingly, as he fastens a noose about Mickey's neck; "Of course, if you should happen to hang yourself, you could hardly blame *me* for that." Mickey objects, but the Blot, putting him atop a high, narrow rafter, says, "Sorry, but you look like the suicide type to me." He warns the mouse not to fall asleep or he will roll off and hang himself. Mickey says there is no chance of that. Ah, but there is, responds the Blot, because the glass of water he just force-fed him was full of "sleeping powder." There is a startling panel of the Blot, far below, waving a cheerful farewell up to the trapped mouse, whose face is torn with anguish even as we notice his eyelids already growing heavy.

This scene also serves to illustrate one of the series' most prominent virtues. Gottfredson and his co-plotters were masters of story construction, especially with regard to the building of suspense. As an introductory essay to the Goofy volume states, whereas Barks dealt with an "even flow of narrative" in his work, Gottfredson devised narrative" in his work, Gottfredson's tales had a "breathless quality" to them. At his best, Gottfredson devised plots in which Mickey had to overcome long series of obstacles to his goal without let-up as the story built to a powerfully dramatic climax

in which he achieved his triumph. In the Phantom Blot adventure, for example, after the numerous nearly fatal brushes with the villain, there is an amazing chase scene. The Blot takes off in a motorboat with Mickey in pursuit and then switches to a one-man airplane. The mouse leaps aboard and, astoundingly, by manipulating the wires attached to the plane's tail, brings the plane completely under his control and forces the previously seemingly omnipotent Blot into a landing. It's the best example there is of the way Gottfredson shows the small mouse, through his cleverness and determination, overpowering someone or somebody much bigger. Mickey's repeated hand-to-hand fights with Peg-Leg Pete also serve this theme. The chase is also a favorite Gottfredson motif, whether in his thrillers or his purely comedic stories. The two volumes contain three separate stories about races to win much needed prize money and vindications of besmirched reputations. As for the thrillers, today's comics writers could learn a great deal about building suspense from a study of the untitled 1935 *Mouse* adventure reprinted in *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics*. Here Mickey and his friend Horace race Peg-Leg Pete and his partner Squinch to find a buried treasure needed to pay off the mortgage on Clarabelle's house, which Squinch holds. The sequence involves a race in separate cars, a fistfight in which the heroes tumble down a hill, Pete's pursuit of Mickey from a plane, firing bullets, the theft of Mickey's map and car, Mickey's and Horace's renewed pursuit via motorcycle, ending with their imprisonment on false charges, a new race towards the treasure on horseback, the near-poisoning of the heroes, the villains' arrival at the treasure's site first, followed by a shootout and a fistfight between Pete and Mickey that finishes with Pete's ignominious defeat. But that is hardly the end, because even though Mickey and Horace get the treasure, their car breaks down while the escaped Squinch flies back home to foreclose the mortgage in revenge. Squinch gets there first, but there is a clever surprise denouement to the story. Gottfredson had real talent for devising unexpected and dramatic reversals that would lead to his happy endings, again both in his comedies and his melodramas. In the comedic "Love Trouble," for example, Minnie's new boyfriend, whom we had been led to believe is a man (mouse, rather) of some wealth, is exposed publicly as a fraud in the midst of a high society party by a singing telegram delivered (off-key) by Goofy.

Gottfredson continued doing the daily *Mouse* strip until his retirement in 1975, but, according to the *Goofy* book, "After 1945 the stories disintegrated into loosely related episodes." In 1955 the distributor, King Features Syndicate, had *Mickey* turned into a daily gag strip, the form in which most of you reading this have known it and, like me, probably have been bored by it. In its heyday *Mickey Mouse* was one of the great continuity strips. It is a shame that no one has yet come along or, for all I know, even been encouraged to come along, who could continue Gottfredson's or Barks's work in making the Disney funny animal comics more than juvenile fluff. ●

GEN continued from page 31

unintentionally adds a sound-track to my comics, and after a while the sun began to appear with the sound of a distant gong or chime, its pitch varying as the panel shape varied and as the sky around it darkened or lightened. There was something uniquely oriental in this something I can't quite express, but which was infinitely pleasing and calming, like a slow dissolve in a tender movie—the perfect counterpoint to the increasing tension and anxiety in the plot.

After the second air raid alert, Gen's father becomes even more outspoken in his criticism of the government and is branded a traitor. It is important to note that he is not a pacifist or even an anti-militarist. This is not a tear-jerker about saintly victims. The man beats his children, for instance. He is on the edge of violence most of the time. He is stupidly foolhardy. But his reasons, while not philosophical, are true at heart. He loves his family and he doesn't want to see his three children and pregnant wife starve or be bombed. For him the only protest is a pragmatic and irreverant one; he has been driven beyond his limit of endurance.

The children begin to take on their father's burdens. In defending him against the taunts of their friends, they become targets for violence. Gen's response, a shockingly depicted one, is to bite off the finger of his tormentor. As with his father's outspoken protest, the incident creates problems instead of solving them. The police come to the house. Gen's father is taken away and beaten by the cops. When Gen discovers who has turned his father in as a traitor, he and his younger brother ambush him and bite his other finger off!

And still the Bomb doesn't drop.

HMPH.
THOSE BRATS WHO BIT YOUR FINGER OFF... THIS'LL TEACH 'EM, RYUKICHI.
I ASKED THE POLICEMAN TO GIVE HIM A ROUGH TIME OF IT
ALL THAT NAKAOKA FAMILY'S A NUISANCE.
ぜいたくは敵だ
© 1980 Keiji Nakazawa

Suddenly, almost at the end of the book, I realized that it wasn't going to. Not in this volume anyway. With a sigh, I was ready to relax and enjoy the next few pages, but, like a good novel, the plot had gathered a tremendous head of steam and once it hit top speed, there was no turning back. The man with the bitten fingers returns for revenge, Gen's mother picks up a cleaver to defend her children . . .and I'll tell you one thing, this is definitely a comic I am going to buy the second issue of! And the next. And the next.

Most people read comics for amusement and vicarious thrills. I suppose I am like most people. And yet the very shallowness which attracts me to comics can at times grow wearisome. I want more—intellectual stimulation, philosophical speculation, literary and artistic brilliance—and I can count on the fingers of Mickey Mouse's hand the number of comics which attempt to satisfy these needs. *Gen of Hiroshima* is one. Keiji Nakazawa appears to be simply concerned with recounting certain historical events in a thinly fictionalized form, but of course, like any introspective autobiography, his work goes far beyond that. *Gen* is an important comic, a graphic novel about life in Japan, about people pushed beyond the point of rationality and good sense, and about family love and loyalty. Rivas is to be praised for bringing this book to the American public, and Keiji Nakazawa deserves to be considered among the most thought-provoking cartoonists in the field. ●

The Comicollector in Retrospect

There are very few people who have never read a comic book at one time or another. Comics have been in existence long enough that the overwhelming majority of the American public grew up with them. Yet, only a small percentage of people continue reading comic books past the age of fifteen, and fewer yet actively collect them.

The comics collector is a strange "animal." His convictions and motivations set him in a world of his own. A true collector is instilled with a compelling fascination that few non-collectors can comprehend, which in effect makes him a deviant in society. Yet to the collector, little can match the endless hours of involvement, excitement and enthusiasm which the collecting brings. Once "bitten" by the collecting bug, it is difficult to shake the mania. The intent of this column will be to explore and analyze these "animals," one of whom I am proud to be.

Comics is an artform which is uniquely American and was unleashed at the turn of the century. They became so popular that in a short time almost every newspaper carried a comics section. They were an accepted form of relaxation, escape and enjoyment. With such popularity for the newspaper comic strips, comic books were inevitable. The comic book enjoyed enormous popularity all through the Depression and World War II as people needed an escape from those hard times. Comics provided that escape, and more. Their subject matter appealed to optimism and soon afterwards to patriotism and a sense of justice.

However, the war's end brought a slump. The comic book heroes had no enemy in common with the American public. When newspaper strips began, they had a good-sized following of adult readers. Something happened to the credibility of comics in these "dark ages." They began to be labelled as "kid stuff." The stories themselves became repetitious and seemed written "down" to a child's level. Adults caught reading comics were laughed at. Except for kids, comics fans went into hiding and sales dropped.

This can be seen partly because of the post-war blues. America had, through the experience of war, quickly grown up, as it were. The "good guys always win" type of comics were dying in popularity. The industry in general tried new ideas. Some publishers aimed for the barbaric, pessimistic, darker and weaker side of the reader's nature. The most popular comics soon became those dealing with crime, horror, sex and violence, and most of the industry followed suit. This new genre ruled in the late 1940s and early 1950s, although a few mainstream superheroes and cartoon titles still survived.

But this change in emphasis in comics did not go unnoticed. Beginning in the late 1940s and culminating with Fredric Wertham's book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, comic books were under attack. The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency's investigations and media crusades left a serious and perhaps permanent mark on comics.

With the formation of the industry-regulated Comics Code Authority, the industry tried to make a comeback from the near wholesale cancellations which occurred in the wake of public outcry. A direction was sorely needed. DC's revival of the superhero genre, with the Martian Manhunter and then the Flash, helped the industry get back on its feet. Finally, in 1961, Stan Lee decided to leave the horror field for the most part and get into the superhero business again. And the rest, as they say, is history. Superheroes have dominated the industry ever since. Many variations on the superhero formula have been tried (anti-heroes, for example) but basically the formula has remained the same.

A strange phenomenon became evident in the early 1960s, which grew in the mid-to-late 1960s and eventually boomed in the 1970s. This is the advent of widespread

I'M PRISTINE MINT!
I ♥ LOVE OLD COMICS-- BUT THEIR CONDITION MUST BE PERFECT!
I'D DO ANYTHING FOR COMICS LIKE THAT!
--EVEN KILL!
RARE COMICS
GOOD ART COMICS
ESOTERIC COMICS

Character ©1980 Peter I. Sanderson, Jr.
Art by Richard E. Howell

comic book collecting, and comic book collectors. Although the seeds of organized comics fandom were planted by the DC superhero titles of the late 1950s, it wasn't until Marvel's emergence that the phenomenon really caught on. Titles such as *Fantastic Four* and *Spider-Man* began to have huge followings by the 1960s. Comic book stores, conventions and fanzines began appearing everywhere.

The appearance of the first Overstreet *Comic Book Price Guide* changed the picture dramatically. For the first time, collectors had a base by which to price their comics, and within the next few years the number of collectors and the values of rarer comics increased in enormous increments. [The full ramifications of the *Price Guide* will be covered in a future article — Ed.] Comics are now one of the best investments one can make. In ten years, I've seen the value of *Fantastic Four* #1 increase from $5.00 to $1,000.00 and *Marvel Mystery Comics* increase from $200.00 to $10,000.00.

Unlike collectors of other items, the comics collector has many more drawing factors to instill a more permanent attraction to his hobby. Like the coin or stamp collector on the surface, the comics collector is motivated by a driving urge to collect. The fun of the frantic search and satisfaction of the find can be an unparalleled and rewarding experience. Unlike the stamp or coin collector, the comic collector's involvement often branches out to related areas. For example, I have a wide range of interests and have collected things like films, posters, TV and movie items, and artwork. Still, I always find myself going back to comics even as other interests fade. Aside from the collecting "bug," comics satisfy the desire for artwork, literature, humor and a fantasy world in which to escape any time one pleases. Unlike the world of film, once the comics "world" is entered, it can be re-entered.

Unfortunately, due to the treatment of our hobby by the mass media, greed has become a permanent and major motivation for some collectors. The media has "progressed" from the "ha-ha, look at this dumb guy who still saves those funnybooks at his age" stage to the "my gawd, these things I threw away as a kid are worth a fortune; I wish I had kept them" syndrome. In my ten years as a mail order comics dealer and the seven years I've operated my stores, I've been the subject of perhaps fifteen television interviews and many radio, newspaper and magazine articles in several cities. Yet not once have I been interviewed with a result I've been satisfied with. The media's conversation always steers away from the topic of comics themselves and anything that did have "guts" to it was deleted in the editing room. Their fascination is with the dollar value and they blatantly ignore the motivational aspects that this column will explore.

The media coverage has, in turn, given a false impression of the merits of the hobby. Just as the general public has become interested in investing in silver and gold, part of it is interested in finding out how to invest in comics. The unfortunate part is that these investors pass over the fun parts of collecting and go straight for the bucks.

This continuous treatment by the media has changed the small group of true collectors (who collect comics only for their intrinsic value) into a number of groups with complex and mixed motivations. If one were to list comics collectors by type, they could be divided into five categories: (a) the reader/passive collector; (b) the collector of stories with literary value; (c) the person who collects for the artwork; (d) the collector who enjoys the artform as a whole; and (e) the person who collects for financial reasons. I'll deal with each of these rough groups individually in my next column. ●

GRELL continued from page 52

FEATURE: Do you have any say about who's inking the book?

GRELL: I say a lot, but nobody listens! They told me last year that I could get a different inker on the book the first time I delivered a story on time. Now, I am notoriously behind on my deadlines. I sat down and did six months' worth of work in two months and I got so far ahead they didn't know what to do with the stuff when it came into the office. I delivered covers four months ahead. I delivered artwork six weeks ahead. I delivered scripts three months ahead. And I went to them and said, "Okay, who are we going to get to ink the book?" And they said they couldn't take Vince Colletta off the book. And I asked, "Why not?" And they said, "Well, they'll know that he's being dumped and the company needs him because you can give him a book today and he can deliver it tomorrow fully inked." And with that, I packed up my stuff and came back to Wisconsin and said the hell with it. I consequently let things slide and got further and further behind on my deadlines. And then they hit me with the proposition that, "if you get caught up again we'll put Bob Smith on the book." I started doing a story and I really laid it on. I took a lot of time doing pencils and did some of my best work in a year. I had about eight pages done and called them up and said, "Tell Bob the stuff is coming in and it's going to be really great." And they said, "Well . . . Bob's not going to ink this one." I had done those eight pages in about three days. The rest of the book took me about three weeks to finish. By the time I was done with it, the artwork that was going into it was nowhere as good as the first few pages. But it doesn't matter because when it's inked it'll all look the same anyway.

FEATURE: Where do you see the series going from here?

GRELL: Eventually (laughter), I want to do like what Mike Fleisher did in *Jonah Hex* and have a story, the death of the Warlord.

FEATURE: Stuffed and mounted at the end?!

GRELL: (Laughter) Nothing quite like that. I really would like to do the story for the simple reason that if the book continues forever I'll never get to draw it. When I began the series I had a definite thought in mind of it being a total, complete story, sort of like Mallory's *La Morte D'Arthur*. We started out in the beginning, go through the whole works and have the characters die at the end. What basically is intended to happen is that the Warlord serves his purpose and after he passes on the gauntlet is taken up by his son. Hal Foster had that idea when he began *Prince Valiant*. He fully intended to have Arn become the dominant character, but after so many years with Valiant as the dominant character the syndicate didn't want to just kill the guy off. But he intended the eventual death of Prince Valiant.

In the future, I'm going to play up the angle of the Warlord being sort of a Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, where he is able by his unique knowledge and position to help these people achieve a certain amount of civilization. One of the things that's going to happen is that in issue #50 there will be more or less a final confrontation with Demos. I'm going to bring back all of the characters and there's going to be one hellacious battle. The book will very likely take a slightly different direction after that.

FEATURE: Do you have any plans for yourself aside from the Warlord?

GRELL: I still have my connection with Dale Messick and if she ever retires I'd take *Brenda Starr* off her hands in a minute (laughter). I also have a couple of comic strip ideas I've been sitting on that I'd like to take the time off to develop. Lately, I've been experimenting with oil painting. And there's a portfolio that will appear in April. The title is "Warriors" and each plate is a different warrior in a different setting and they're in different medium and composition.

In May I'm going to Pennsylvania to study with Sean Wyeth, who's the nephew of Andrew Wyeth and fabulous in his own right. He's taken an interest in me and has invited me to study with him in his studio. He turns out to be quite a comics fan himself. We met at a convention in Syracuse and spent two days talking art. What I'm doing with my oil paintings now is because of him.

I'm leaning very much these days towards wildlife illustration. If I were going to pick a role for myself in the future it would be somewhere between a comic strip artist and a wildlife illustrator on the order of Bob Coon or Robert Bateman. The outdoors and wild animals are really, next to comic strips, my first love. ●

End Notes

by Peter Sanderson

Manhunter, the Complete Saga, by Archie Goodwin and Walt Simonson (Excalibur Enterprises, $8.50) reprints the award-winning seven-part serial from *Detective Comics* that has attracted notice for, among other things, its unusual conclusion. Unlike other comics heroes, this version of Manhunter cannot be brought back again and again for stories both good and bad: Goodwin and Simonson gave him a heroic and unquestionably real death, thus ending the series in a particularly unexpected and impressive manner. What may have escaped notice, however, is Manhunter's attitude towards his own life and death, which also broke the conventions of superhero stories. Spider-Man, for example, is continually having fits of despair and vowing to give up being a superhero, but by the story's end he is back in costume and glad that he is. The fact that the *Manhunter* series came to a permanent stop meant that is could take a far grimmer tone. Its hero did not have to take the attitude that his career (and hence the series) must go on; by the final installment Manhunter was clearly a hero who could not shake off his feelings of alienation from life, and perhaps in the end did not want to.

Manhunter is Captain America in reverse. Both are heroes from World War II who were preserved, unaging, in suspended animation for decades and then returned to life. But while Captain America remained committed to his career, Manhunter was disgusted by his "dirty and ugly" wartime missions. "All sense of adventure died for me in the war," he says. He tries to return to his life as a big game hunter in his secret identity of Paul Kirk, but like war, this work involves killing, and "weary, revulsed," Kirk finds "What had been sport now seemed senseless and brutal." Unable to shoot at an animal, Kirk fires into the air, and is immediately nearly killed by a gigantic elephant, which appeared as if Kirk had signalled it to mete out retribution for his past killings of men and beasts. Comics writers who contend that World War II superheroes must have naively simplistic views of life would do well to consider this tale.

Kirk is resurrected by the superscience of the Council, and organization that perverts whatever it touches. It twists the friendships between Kirk and his teacher Asano Nitobe, and the Batman and Dan Kingdom, and the love between Interpol agent Christine St. Clair and her father into enmity, and when parental love finally resurfaces in the latter case, rewards it with death. It turns the law, represented by Interpol's Damon Nostrand, into criminality, and a church into a den of conspirators. The Council's own mission to save the world from disorder has been twisted by its own fanaticism into an attempt to enslave it. It tries to subjugate Kirk's will, too, and, when it fails, forces him continually to battle subservient clones of himself, the images of what they would have made him into. "Each time I kill one of those damned clones," Manhunter says, "I feel I'm reclaiming part of myself!" Extended life, while a blessing to Captain America, becomes yet another perversion of nature. Manhunter no longer leads a private life as Kirk, and significantly, though we might have expected a romance to develop between him and Christine, none ever does. Except for his few allies, he says, "there's not much that makes me glad of being restored to life by the Council . . . .I didn't welcome death, but coming out of World War II, weary, disillusioned . . .I found a kind of peace in it. A peace the Council shattered." Not only has Kirk's world turned empty and mad, but perhaps his debate with the Batman over the morality of killing, which Manhunter again finds a necessity to his work, indicates that Kirk himself has been tainted by the world's amorality. Kirk's only reason for living is that his "prey remains at large," and so it is appropriate that he dies in the act of destroying the Council at long last.

This pessimism is but a subtext to the series, though. First and foremost, *Manhunter* is a brilliant and thrilling adventure story, filled with striking and dynamic artistic compositions, surprising plot twists, ironic humor, unusual and intriguing methods of combat, and the ability to inspire a true sense of wonder. Though not yet a decade old, *Manhunter* is obviously a classic of the medium that will survive the test of time.

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The first page of *Hembeck 1980* (Fantaco Enterprises, $2.50) sums up the essence of the book. There's Fred, in the midst of an enormous assemblage of superheroes of all descriptions, bidding the reader "Welcome" to his world. DC, Marvel and the other companies may have created these characters, and may legally own them, but in a sense they belong to all of us who love them, too. Fred Hembeck represents all of us in this regard. He caricatures comic book characters, he kids them, and sometimes he even hints briefly that some comics series, or the work of some writer or artist, is not to be endured, but all of his cartoon commentaries on the comics are clearly motivated by an intense, all-encompassing love for the medium. Fred is what all of us are beneath the intellectual approaches we might take to criticizing comics or our bitter complaints about the comics that disappoint us: he is Everyfan, reveling in the imaginativeness that has created so many wonderful characters, memorable stories and superb artwork throughout the history of the comic book. One of the best parts of his new book, a collection of twenty pages of new cartoons plus many old favorites from his *Buyer's Guide* series, is his three-part series on his reactions to the *Superman* movie. Before seeing the movie, he is wary, remembering all the times he has been badly burnt by TV adaptations of comics. But nevertheless, he can't help literally jumping for anticipatory joy, hoping that this time everything will be perfect. Then he sees it, and he becomes the picture of the dispassionate critic, cataloguing the pros and the cons. A while later he sees the film again, realizes that his past reservations matter little compared to the movie's virtues, and once again pictures himself jumping for joy. Hembeck's work is not the place to find the detailed analytical criticism the medium needs and has earned, but no one else so directly conveys the feelings of sheer pleasure that a good comics story can give.

Hembeck 1980 is just as funny as Fred's previous book, but it also shows him making interesting progress at a cartoonist. Consider the way he manages to recreate the styles of Kirby, Ditko, Sprang and Infantino within his own, or his realistic but parodic imitation of an EC science fiction cover. The best sign for the future is his hilarious Newlywed Game sequence with Hawkman and Hawkgirl, Reed and Sue Richards, the Vision and the Scarlet Witch, and a newly wifeless Flash. Here Hembeck breaks away from his usual one-page mode and builds a comedy idea into a four page story. It would be interesting to see what more he can do in this direction.●